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Performing Literacy: How Women Read the World in the Late Eighteenth-Century British Novel

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PERFORMING LITERACY: HOW WOMEN READ THE WORLD IN THE LATE
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

PERFORMING LITERACY: HOW WOMEN READ THE WORLD IN THE LATE
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the intersection of sensibility, social identity, and literacy practices among representations of women readers in four late eighteenth-century British novels. Through an analysis of the authors' use of identity constructs which shaped and were shaped by reading practices, this study documents the rise of social identity formation as mutually constitutive with the history of reading. The first chapter reveals how Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* uses Arabella's follies as education for readers about the corresponding processes of reading their society and reading novels. The second chapter argues that Frances Burney's *Evelina* considers women's ability to read others as essential, but, in seeing literacy as a type of performance, rejects women who incorporate literate ways of knowing and thinking into their identity. In the third chapter, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* portrays the boundary between private and public selves for women as blurred, thereby suggesting that women readers must reconstitute their image of self as identity borderlands in order to make use of their reading skills and practices. The fourth chapter on Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* reveals the results of late eighteenth-century culture's increased emphasis on the uses of reading for social and personal identity-work: a self that functions as a nexus for various social identities rather than as a seat for private, interiorized consciousness. The final chapter argues for increased emphasis on the role social identity plays in the literacy identities and practices of twenty-first century students, whose perceived deficiencies in reading comprehension have provided a challenge for some reading teachers.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: “You Are Well Read, I See”: Literacy and Identity in the Late Eighteenth-Century British Novel.....	1
Chapter One: Quixotic Romanticism: English Social Literacy in <i>The Female Quixote</i>	32
Chapter Two: Frances Burney’s <i>Evelina</i> and the Book of the World	55
Chapter Three: Useful Literacy: Identity Borderlands and Character Development in <i>Belinda</i> ..	78
Chapter Four: Jane Austen’s <i>Northanger Abbey</i> , the Illusions of Self, and a Society of Readers	101
Chapter Five: Conclusion: Social Identity in the Reading Classroom	120
Works Cited	134
Appendix A.....	149
Appendix B	154

Introduction

“You Are Well Read, I See”: Literacy and Identity in the Late Eighteenth-Century British Novel

In Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), the libertine Mr. B assaults his servant Pamela's letters almost as frequently as he sexually harasses her. These heartfelt letters capture Pamela's attempts to protect her virtue, her innermost feelings, and her sense of who "Pamela" is and what she stands for. Thus, when Mr. B and his minions intercept her impassioned missives to her family, they not only physically subject her to the lascivious intentions of Mr. B, they also gain control over her textual representation of herself, the literate expression of her identity. In this way, Pamela's situation serves to illustrate how textual representation of individual fictional characters complicated eighteenth-century readers' understanding of female identities and female autonomy. As this project will suggest, policing and publicizing these self-representations became an integral concern for literate, semi-literate, and non-literate individuals in the sociable culture of eighteenth-century England.

Additionally, the emerging genre of the novel and its interest in representing real lives further complicated the intersection between literacy and identity. Pamela's literacy, uncommon but not unheard of for a working class woman, marks her as a woman capable of crossing class boundaries. This mobility is challenged by the novel, as Mr. B's aristocratic friends and even Pamela herself question her ability to assimilate into the upper class. Yet as Richardson delves into the inner workings of her psychological life through her letters, he positions Pamela as the kind of realistic person with whom a reader could empathize and identify. Literacy (on both Pamela's and the reader's part) thus becomes associated with a type of selfhood that is universal;

little Pamela Andrews, maidservant to the late Lady B, crosses class barriers in the novel and enables readers to think about what might happen if they, too, crossed class barriers. Thus, Pamela's story influenced not only personal reflections on selfhood, but collective reflections on social class, gender roles, and other issues that intersected with the type of person Pamela was. Pamela is just one example of the characters who prompted novel readers and literary critics to fear and celebrate the possibility that real life will imitate text.

Within the novel, Richardson's Mr. B addresses the dangers of literacy to society, suggesting that he and Pamela will mimic the passionate (and dangerous) storyline of the traditional romance: "O my good girl! [...] you are well read, I see; and we shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty story for a romance, I warrant ye" (63). For me, Mr. B's ominous comment prompts several important questions that commenced my study of literacy and identity in the late eighteenth-century novel. What exactly does Mr. B mean when he says that Pamela was "well-read"? How can Pamela's literacy, which has previously established her status as a subject, be used to resist or avoid Mr. B's powerful gaze? If a "story for a romance" is what Mr. B sees the two "making out" of her reading, what does Pamela want to "make out" of it? Why does Richardson have Mr. B attempt to make a romance within a novel, and how does he see the quasi-romantic ending of the novel (Pamela and Mr. B's marriage) contributing to the emerging genre of the novel? In attempting to answer these questions, I was strongly influenced by the work of Nancy Armstrong, who argues that eighteenth-century novels shaped personal identity and the concept of the interior self, as they worked on "universalizing the individual subject" (*How Novels Think* 10). Like Armstrong, I see novels as an important source of identity work, and I am intrigued by her analysis of Pamela: "It is literacy alone that transforms [Pamela] from an object [Mr. B] can forcibly possess into a self-possessed subject who can consent to his

offer of marriage” (5). Armstrong’s suggestion that literacy could *create* a female subject out of the detritus of her former self is fascinating, but I wonder what notions are wrapped up in the term *literacy*. In both the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, *literacy* tends to serve as a catch-all term that encompasses a wide variety of meanings and skills related to the ability to read and write.

Thus, the inquiry that truly drives my research is this: how does literacy really make a difference in the lives of individuals like Pamela, and to what extent can literacy actually *make* someone into a subject? To deconstruct the relationship Armstrong posits between eighteenth-century concepts of literacy and subjectivity, I came up with the following questions.

1. What literacy skills and cognitive attributes did the late eighteenth-century novel use to construct the figure of a “good reader”?
2. How do women use literacy to negotiate their status as spectator (reader of a book) and as a spectacle (object of society’s gaze)?
3. How do eighteenth-century women use literacy or literacy skills in their social lives and personal identity-work?
4. What is the relationship between eighteenth-century authors’ perception of “real life” and the fictional accounts of “real life” that they wrote into their novels?

These questions guided my analysis of four eighteenth-century novels written by women authors who employed, rejected, or modified the trope of the female reader: Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote*, Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. This introduction provides background on the most prominent scholarly discussions, past and present, that intersect with my project: literacy identity, the history of

literacy in late-eighteenth century England, taste and aesthetics, sympathy and sensibility, the public and private sphere, social identity, the figure of the reader, and the rise of the novel.

Literacy and Identity

James Paul Gee writes that language, and by extension literacy, are intricately involved with the ways that people present themselves to others:

If I had to single out a primary function of human language, it would be not one, but the following two closely related functions: to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions. (*Introduction 1*)

Even if I am relating the same essential information – my successful completion of this dissertation, for example – I use different language when I am speaking to my grandmother, my students, my close friends, and my Facebook friends. Each instance of language-in-use, called *discourse*, can situate, reinforce, and perhaps even reimagine my social connections to these different groups, as my choice of language and the reception by my audience help to determine our relationship and my social identities. Furthermore, Gee posits that no one is born knowing all of the discourses and social identities that they will inhabit over the course of their lifetime; people have to learn what it means to talk, write, act, think, behave, and live as a member of the groups they belong to or want to belong to. Culturally-agreed upon aspects of discourses serve, in Gee’s terms, as “identity kits” for individuals looking to enter that discourse (33). Thus, discourses and social identities can be acquired through formal or informal education. The culmination of that education is the ability to operate through reading, writing, and language in a discourse, also called *literacy*.¹

¹ For the general public, “literacy” most often means the ability to read and write to some standard of fluency, as, for example, when elementary school students take a literacy portion of a

Individuals enter literate discourse through what Deborah Brandt calls “literacy sponsors,” or “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). In late-eighteenth century England (as today), the novel was one such literacy sponsor. Through engaging storytelling, realistic characters, and scandalous events, novels inspired some individuals to learn how to read or read in a different manner. By the same token, novels argued for the authority of certain kinds of readers, offering up identity kits for multiple models of selfhood. Other novel readers also served as literacy sponsors, as some read novels aloud or helped circulate novels amongst their literate, semi-literate, and non-literate acquaintances. With the assistance or motivation (positive or negative) from literacy sponsors, novel readers engaged in what Shirley Brice Heath calls the “literacy event,” or “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (445). Like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, readers – particularly readers who read the same text or type of text – sought out other individuals in real life or in print who shared their experience. Overall, Brandt’s and Heath’s terminology help literacy scholars understand literacy as a social activity: social structures and interactions are catalysts for literacy, and literacy can form the root of certain social relations.

When readers enter conversation over a text – both in person and in discursive spaces – they produce a conglomeration of literacy events, what I call a *reading culture*. Today, a number of websites collect individual readings of popular (and unpopular) texts to create an archive of a reading culture. For example, *Goodreads.com*, *Librarything.com*, and the review features on

standardized exam. While the literacy rate of eighteenth-century England is relevant to my study, I employ a definition of literacy more in keeping with literacy scholars, who often refer to *multiple literacies*, to reflect the multiple discourses that individuals engage in over the course of their lives.

Amazon.com host worldwide discussions on a vast number of print and electronic texts, and on these sites readers analyze and respond to overt messages and miniscule particularities in the chosen text, in addition to sharing other relevant reading experiences. Although the eighteenth century did not have access to the same types of global communication that we have today, there is one significant similarity: a reading culture inhabits both the private (domestic) and public aspects of an individual's life, as readers engage with family members, close friends, professional reviewers, and, for some select texts, a nation of readers that amass in print.

In the process of reading texts and interacting with reading culture, I suggest that a reader comes to determine a *literacy identity*, or a concept of the self as a reader and writer of texts. In modern parlance, a fan of the *Harry Potter* books might use the series as a way to describe what it means to be a reader and what it means to be herself. She might characterize herself as belonging to one of the Hogwarts school houses, implying a certain type of personality, or she might conceive of *Harry Potter* readers as more sophisticated or educated than readers of the *Twilight* series. In short, literacy identity is an accumulation of explicit and implicit attempts to narrate the self's interaction with text. By investigating the ways in which individuals come to understand themselves and their world through their individual and social experiences with literacy, I follow John F. Szwed's instructions:

I propose that we [...] step back to [...] the *social meaning of literacy*: that is, the roles these abilities play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts for their performance; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities. (422)

In tracing the development of fictional women's literacy identities, this study explores the ways in which women authors of the late eighteenth century envision texts passing through the boundaries between the individual and society. However, Brian Street has observed that literacy

is not exempt from the influence of cultural authorities and normative practices, as he argues that “literacy practices are aspects not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures” (434). Street’s ideological model of literacy studies considers the ways in which societal institutions and their ideologies work on and amongst individuals in regards to their literacy practices.² The particular power structures of relevance to late eighteenth-century literacy that I outline in the remaining sections of this introduction are trends in literacy rates; material conditions of literacy; the publishing industry; discourses of self-improvement and utility; educational philosophies; theories of aesthetics, taste, sympathy, and sensibility; and gendered notions of public space.

Social Literacy in the Late Eighteenth Century and the Book of the World

Although public concern over reading might suggest that new readers were flooding the market, literacy rates in England actually rose very slowly, with occasional declines, over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By examining the signatures on marriage registers from 1750 to 1850, R.S. Schofield finds that although there is some increase in literacy among women, the rate of improvement is not nearly what it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when literacy rates in England approached universal (207-208).³ According to Schofield’s data, an optimistic estimate of women’s literacy is around 40% in 1750, but the

² Mary Ann Janda observes that literacy is not always used as encouragement, and that historical accounts of literacy should also account for ways in which literacy is used as a punishment. When considering how we document individual and institutional uses of literacy as discipline, she adds that “we must be willing to examine what literate people *say* was important to them in their literacy experience” (57).

³ The Marriage Act of 1753 required couples to sign marriage registers, and several literacy historians use those signatures to estimate the literacy rate before public schooling was required for all children. They justify the data by observing that schools tended to teach writing after they taught reading, so the ability to write one’s name probably meant that the subject had been educated to read in some fashion. In addition, this information is available for a wide scope of the population, as opposed to indirect indications of literacy such as publication information and an increase in educational institutions (Schofield 203-204).

rate only improved to just above 50% by 1840. Richard Altick estimates that in the eighteenth century, the population of England and Wales rose from 5.5 million to a little under 9 million, and most growth was in the lower socioeconomic classes, who tended to be less literate than other classes with greater access to educational facilities and leisure time. “By 1780,” Altick remarks, “the national literacy rate was scarcely higher than it had been during the Elizabethan period” (30). However, Schofield’s and Altick’s data does not necessarily speak to the number of women who read longer works, such as novels, as writing one’s name is much different from reading a three-volume set. On the other hand, literacy rates also do not account for the individuals who had literate friends or acquaintances to provide access to print texts, such as the number of women who listened to someone read a novel aloud.⁴ Ultimately, one of the things that we can rely on regarding the spread of print literacy in late eighteenth century England is the disconnect between the unknown number of audience members for novels and the alternatively intimate and broadening audience of readers that texts themselves projected as an ideological and rhetorical construction. Although literacy rates did not keep pace with the mounting concern over new readers, scholars in history, literacy, and literature have identified several shifts in the ways that eighteenth-century readers tended to practice literacy skills.

First, the growth of capitalism spurred changes in urbanization and industrialization. Advances in industrial technology tended to collect workers in an urban area, and many of these workers were required to develop new skills. Sometimes, factory workers needed literacy to perform certain tasks, but Carl Kaestle suggests that industrialization did not necessarily produce

⁴ David Vincent argues that “enclaves” or “ghettos” of non-literates were rare at best; even those who were not literate had some sort of contact with those who were, and many people probably existed in what we might call a “semi-literate” state: able to read some words but not others, and certainly able to access print texts through their friends, neighbors, and children who could read aloud (13).

more readers: “literacy is correlated with economic growth in a region but depressed temporarily by factory production” (108). The working class tended to have less leisure time to read for pleasure, but those readers who did learn to read were in closer proximity to other readers. However, reading did not necessarily equal upward mobility into new types of jobs. As David Vincent writes about the late eighteenth century, “[m]ore than any other factor, how the child’s father earned a living determined its chances of learning to read and write” (3).

Nonetheless, for those who could read, eighteenth-century individuals had many print texts to choose from. Altick argues that the most important contribution of the eighteenth century was increased access to texts, particularly fictional prose: “When novels became easily available through circulating libraries, their popularity [...] touched off the first widespread discussion of the social effects of a democratized reading audience” (63).⁵ Books were less expensive than in previous generations (although still out of the range of many middle-class families), and libraries fostered the reading tastes of their subscribers. Out of between 6 and 7 million inhabitants of England in 1750, Altick reports that *Joseph Andrews* (1742) sold 6,500 copies in 13 months, and *Roderick Random* (1748) sold 5,000 in a year. Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751) sold an astonishing 5,000 in a week or less, suggesting a reading population that was rather small in proportion to the general public, but with a voracious appetite for popular fiction (49).⁶ Additionally, serialized periodicals reflected shifts towards egalitarian public discourse, and collections of letters, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*, were

⁵ David Vincent makes a similar claim for the novel, but points towards the capacity for imagination as the greatest stride of eighteenth-century literacy: “Of all the possible functions of literacy in [the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries], the development and feeding of the imagination was much the most intensive” (196).

⁶ William St. Clair’s study of early nineteenth-century readers suggests that this pattern continued well into the next century; some of the most popular texts of the Romantic era were actually published in the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

published as educational travelogues for an eager readership. However, the spread of print texts, as Harvey Graff argues, was also useful for the purposes of social control: “The purpose of literacy, in the past as in the present, was to integrate society and to foster progress by binding men and women in its web and instilling in them the guidelines for correct behavior” (*Labyrinths* 53). By fostering certain types of literacy and producing print artifacts, the eighteenth-century English publishing industry served both democratic and undemocratic objectives.

Similarly, reading practices were portrayed as both harmful and useful for individuals. Popular discourse, particularly around novels, fashioned certain types of reading as contributing to overly sentimental, disorderly, flighty, extravagant, shallow, and ignorant subjects.⁷ Thought to excite the passions, promote unrealistic romantic expectations, and suggest erotic fantasies, novels drew criticism from sources as unlikely as women authors of the time who discredited their own literary productions.⁸ On the other hand, Enlightenment ideology firmly embraced reading, connecting the practice to self-improvement. Naomi Tadmor provides evidence that reading in the home was a “sociable rather than solitary experience” and “connected not to idleness, listlessness, or frivolity but to a routine of work and religious discipline” (165). For many readers, reading edifying texts constituted a kind of mental workout that often prompted identity-work on the part of the reader. Martyn Lyons points to representations of reading as an individual and personal experience to construct her view of the nineteenth century female reader as “a pioneer of modern notions of privacy and intimacy” (324). Throughout this project, I

⁷ The work of Reinhard Wittmann suggests that these patterns apply to much of Western Europe, particularly Germany and France (44).

⁸ However, some women authors considered these attacks to be worthy of a good joke; for example, the narrator in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* unleashes her famous tirade denouncing those who denounce novels, and in the process she implies the ridiculousness of those who *defend* novels (29-31). Austen’s attitude towards reading culture is further examined in Chapter 4.

explore ways in which the eighteenth-century female reader is a pioneer of modern notions of the *social* reader, a figure which has her roots in the interaction between reading and self-improvement.

Higher education was mostly restricted to the nobility, landed gentry, and merchant classes, and the few schools that served the working class (Sunday schools and charity schools) were mostly interested in producing obedient, hard-working, and orderly subjects than they were in engaging students in critical and difficult reading material.⁹ Particularly for women, educational facilities valued fashionable accomplishments above all, leading Altick to claim that “most eighteenth-century female academies were useless in any cultural sense” (45). On the other hand, advocates like Mary Astell argued that “the want of an ingenious Education [...] renders the generality of *Feminine Conversations* so insipid and foolish and their solitude so insupportable” (54). Astell thought that a liberal and religious education would occupy women’s time more usefully than “reading idle *Novels* and *Romances*,” and regular exposure to edifying books would help women with the rules of English grammar (57, 193). Although education was generally accepted to help students learn the social identity of a genteel young woman, reading’s role in this process was less certain; like Astell, some educational theorists instead directed their students’ reading toward learning the proper use of language and enriching conversational skills.

For women educated at home, two major influences on private education were John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Locke’s 1693 treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, cautions parents and tutors that “a great Care is to be taken, that [reading] be never made as a Business to [the student], nor he look on it as a Task” (208). Unlike the proponents of female

⁹ Focus and discipline were also advocated in Mary Astell’s view of education, as she lamented the “many Intelligent and Industrious Readers [who] when they have Read over a Book are very little wiser than when they began it” (148-149).

education, Locke approved of the pleasurable aspects of reading, particularly when teaching a young child to learn how to read; if a child resists reading, he thought that adults should talk about reading in terms that make it clear that reading is a privilege and reward. At times, Locke sounds like he might be the next guest star on *Sesame Street*, as he proposes that literacy learning be incorporated into play: “[t]here may be Dice and Play-things, with the Letters on them, to teach Children the *Alphabet* by playing; and twenty other ways may be found, suitable to their particular Tempers, to make this kind of *Learning a Sport* to them” (209). In contrast, Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile, or On Education* (1762) discourages early reading, particularly for young women, as “There are more who abuse this fatal knowledge than use it well,” so young girls should learn domestic skills before any others (Book 5). Although Janie Vanpée argues that Rousseau’s ambivalence towards reading is caused by his primary concern of “the conditions that enable the transfer of knowledge to occur” (158), he clearly denounces education by means of reading as one of the most dangerous conditions in which to transfer knowledge. In one particularly vitriolic passage, Rousseau laments the growth of literacy:

The misuse of books is the death of sound learning. People think they know what they have read, and take no pains to learn. Too much reading only produces a pretentious ignoramus. There was never so much reading in any age as the present, and never was there less learning; in no country of Europe are so many histories and books of travel printed as in France, and nowhere is there less knowledge of the mind and manners of other nations. *So many books lead us to neglect the book of the world*; if we read it at all, we keep each to our own page. (Book 5, emphasis mine)

Instead of reading books about the world, Rousseau proposes that individuals should learn to read the book of the world. Thus, even though Rousseau’s educational philosophy condemns *what* we read, he does not necessarily condemn *how* we read – our literacy skills.

Thus, what some might perceive as a simple rejection of reading is in fact more complicated than that. After all, the same Rousseau who suggests that reading might produce a

“pretentious ignoramus” also encourages Émile to read Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), albeit an edited version. Rousseau wants Émile’s “head [to] be full of it, and for him to be ceaselessly busy with his castle, his goats, his plantations,” essentially living Crusoe’s life (Book 3). Early stages in the development of reading, Rousseau implies, are mimetic and literal. Through Crusoe’s story, Émile learns how to read another person, “to examine his hero’s conduct, to search for things he might have omitted or that he might have done better,” thereby collapsing the boundaries between self and fictional character. The book of Defoe supports not only Émile’s knowledge of agriculture, but also his growing understanding of the book of the world – what it means to walk in someone else’s shoes. Rousseau’s educational philosophy encourages a set of skills I call *social literacy*, or the ability to read other people like one would read texts.

In the novels I examine in this project, individuals who employ social literacy skills adapt their print literacy skills and apply those skills to social situations. In particular, understanding character as it is developed in a text and out in the world becomes crucial to late eighteenth-century thinkers as a substitution for the dangerous effects of reading. If readers already read too emotionally and mimetically, some authors propose that these skills be put to some good use. Modern literary critics might describe these methods as “cognitive literary theory,” which suggests that reading evolved to help individuals learn how to understand one another.¹⁰ Ralf Schneider explains what sort of cognitive skills individuals perform when they read characters in fiction:

¹⁰ Experts in cognitive literary studies examine how reading serves as practice for an individual’s “theory of mind.” Theory of mind is the capability for people to make sense of the behaviors of others; those who have theory of mind can attribute mental states, emotions, proclivities, and motivation to others and to themselves. Cognitive scientists are just beginning to understand how this trait is evolutionarily important, as individuals on the autism spectrum seem to lack theory of mind or possess an underdeveloped theory of mind.

[U]nderstanding literary characters requires our forming some kind of mental representation of them, attributing dispositions and motivations to them, understanding and explaining their actions, forming expectations about what they will do next and why, and, of course, reacting emotionally to them. All this happens through a complex interaction of what the text says about the characters and what the reader knows about the world in general, specifically about people and, yet more specifically, about ‘people’ in literature. (608)

Thus, when Rousseau claims that Sophie’s “mind has been formed not only by reading, but by conversation with her father and mother, by her own reflections, and by her own observations in the little world in which she has lived,” he is not necessarily denouncing the types of skills that Sophie gained when she learned how to read (Book 5). Instead, Rousseau, like other eighteenth-century authors, considers the application of literacy skills to the “book of the world.”

Aesthetics, Taste, and the Consumer Subject

Dror Wahrman argues that the eighteenth century emphasized the importance of the modern self, or “an essential core of selfhood characterized by psychological depth, or interiority, which is the bedrock of unique, expressive individual identity” (xi). Whereas earlier models of selfhood situated social identities such as race, class, and gender as flexible categories, Wahrman explains, the eighteenth century came to conceive of these categories as “natural,” immutable, and fixed. However, David Lloyd and Paul Thomas note that this self too is constructed and part of a cultural movement that produced “the ‘organisers of the new culture’ as among the most significant ‘organic’ intellectuals of capitalist society” (27). For Lloyd and Thomas, the development of the modern self as a political and national ideal first took place not at the state level, but in homes, stores, reading salons, and in the review section of the periodical – all places where cultural arbiters of taste held sway. In the eighteenth century, the modern individual, particularly the modern female individual, identified herself and was identified by

choices between books, furniture, clothing, works of art, and any other number of household and personal accessories. As Pierre Bourdieu so succinctly put it, “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (6).

Like other consumer goods, reading material served as an opportunity for classification, both of the text itself and of the individuals who chose to read it. Michel de Certeau observes that reading poses a particular problem for the question of who governs taste, the state or the individual making the choice to read a certain text:

Reading is thus situated at the point where social stratification (class relationships) and poetic operations (the practitioner’s constructions of a text) intersect: a social hierarchization seeks to make the reader conform to the ‘information’ distributed by an elite (or semi-elite); reading operations manipulate the reader by insinuating their inventiveness into the cracks in a cultural orthodoxy. (135)

When authorities (for de Certeau, specifically Enlightenment ideology) present certain texts as edifying, tasteful, and a productive path to self-improvement, they also construct the image of readers as passive vessels of state ideology, not unlike the discourse surrounding female readers in eighteenth-century England. For de Certeau, the reader’s autonomy stems from “real” reading, which he describes as the meandering understanding of a text that happens in a reader’s mind, stopping at interesting moments, rushing onwards to the end, and the variety of unexpected emotions that can accompany a reading experience. Autonomous readers, de Certeau felt, were “travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (136). Similarly, Louise Rosenblatt accounts for the reader’s autonomy when she theorizes that reading exists on an aesthetic-efferent continuum. Aesthetic readers read for feeling and the experience of living like they are in the text, and efferent readers read for information and the concepts that will be retained after the reading is finished (10-11). At any given moment, readers come to texts

from some position on the aesthetic-efferent spectrum, although they may find that certain types of texts are more suitable for certain types of purposes. Both de Certeau and Rosenblatt view reading as a transaction in which the reader's choice of reading material and choice of reading process provide a way for individuals to be autonomous readers and perhaps arbiters of their own tastes.

Thus, while some authorities viewed reading as a form of social control, reading in the eighteenth century was also a source of independence for women. Although choosing a particular book and engaging in a reading culture could subject a woman to the ever-changing attributes of "good taste," her feelings about that reading material and the process she used to read it could also constitute a type of resistance to culturally accepted notions of taste. Moreover, Anne Mellor argues that women writers established their credentials as better arbiters of taste than men, as they "can most wisely judge the competing claims of thought and emotion: what she seeks, in literature as in life, is 'right feeling'" (86). However, the discourses of sensibility and sympathy that helped women determine "right feeling" also produced conflicts over reading that make it more difficult to argue that women's goals in life and in their aesthetic choices could always be aligned.

Sympathy, Shame, and Self

While these theories of taste and aesthetics value individuals' choices of behavior, the eighteenth-century discourse on sympathy and sensibility valued innate and instinctive reactions to situations in the real world and, accordingly, similar situations in print texts. Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) proposed that all individuals were capable of imagining what other people are feeling; however, sympathy "does not arise so much from the view of the

passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (1.1.2). Although Smith locates the ability to understand the other’s situation in the imaginative faculties, feeling sympathy for someone else also requires individuals to interpret and decode information from the situation, in addition to deciding what is and is not important information to include in their analysis of the situation. Thus, the ability to feel sympathy for others draws upon skills associated with literacy – another vision of what it means to read “the book of the world.”

In order to imagine what it is like to be another person, Smith’s concept of sympathy involves seeing personal identity as temporarily or partially unfixed. As Wahrman notes, Smith “wanted to hold to a *doubleness* of personal identity that allows us both to remain ourselves and to experience a transference of identity at the same time, even if this sounds – as Smith himself admitted – ‘perhaps ... impossible’” (188). The transaction of sympathy occurred through the spectator and the spectacle; the spectator imagines herself in the position of the spectacle and interprets the spectacle’s situation to discover the “moral sentiment” they share. Alexander Broadie suggests that “[f]or Smith, sympathy cannot be detached from spectatorship, for it is spectators who sympathise” (158). Smith’s “spectator” recalls an earlier use of the term in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s periodical *The Spectator* (1711), which Jürgen Habermas would later identify as one of the major cornerstones of the bourgeois public sphere. In the first volume, Addison explained that he “live[d] in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species” (1.1).¹¹ This Spectator became the editorial voice of the periodical, the fictional character who, as an observer of English social practices, is qualified to make an

¹¹ Addison also made the intriguing observation that he expected his readers to want to know more about the “author” of his periodical before they could enjoy his writing: “I have observed, that a Reader seldom peruses a Book with Pleasure 'till he knows whether the Writer of it be a black or a fair Man, of a mild or choleric Disposition, Married or a Batchelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right Understanding of an Author” (1.1).

objective reading of that world, and, in Smith's view, qualified to promote mutual feeling that binds society together.

However, spectatorship is also a power relationship, as the spectator's position above and outside the society often implies his capability for leadership. The subject who participates in the discourse of periodicals like *The Spectator* shapes the creation of the public sphere that represented herself to the world; however, Michel Foucault observes that the spectator/spectacle relationship builds an entirely different type of subjectivity. For Foucault, the eighteenth century witnessed a shift in representations of authority. Whereas authorities used to display their power through the spectacle (such as the demonstration of force inherent in the public execution), modern authorities trained their subjects to expect or imagine a spectator watching them. Drawing upon the example of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, Foucault depicts a subject who internalizes the representation expected of him by his authorities and maintained by his perception of their mechanisms of power. Foucault's model of selfhood is particularly apt for female subjects in the domestic novel, as their follies and embarrassments often entail a lesson in social norms. Particularly compared to another model of feminine subjectivity, the shining paragon of female virtue like the titular heroine of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), the female reader "is imagined precisely as a site of shame and crippling self-reproach" (Koehler 13). Through reading, identifying, and sympathizing with the shame of the fictional character, female readers got a taste of the disciplinary power of society within the novel.

Furthermore, the discourse of sensibility, or the physical, emotional, mental, and discursive construction of an individual's receptivity to sensory input, contributed to the novel's impact on the subject. Janet Todd defines sensibility as "the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering" (7). As readers

of the world employ social literacy skills to understand others' situations, they also turn those skills outward and project an image of themselves capable of being read by others. Thus, sensibility is not simply the capacity to feel for others; it is the capacity to write that feeling on your body so that others can interpret your feelings clearly. Ultimately, the discourses of sympathy and sensibility required individuals to employ social literacy skills both as an interpretive model for the world and a code for representation of the self. Small wonder, then, that, as G.J. Barker-Benfield observes, the "history of sensibility is one of increasingly self-conscious conflict" (xxxiii). Women in particular inhabited contradictory roles in society: sensibility was the source of women's submission because their supposedly irrational bodies were perceived to override their minds and the source of their dominance because their association with feeling and morality positioned them as the guardians of tradition and culture.

Scholars of the early nineteenth century have traced how sensibility sets the stage for the later cultural and literary movement of Romanticism, which has traditionally been understood to be a separate phenomenon due to its emphasis on the individual transcending (instead of observing and sharing mutual feeling with) the society he lives in. However, Christopher Nagle argues that "what is most distinctive about the literature we call Romantic might be the uses to which it puts Sensibility" (3). My project traces the underpinnings of the literacy discourse that would produce Romanticism, and further studies could explore this connection more thoroughly. Moreover, as Alan Richardson notes, Romantic-era male writers "drew on memories and fantasies of identification with the mother [or domestic identity] in order to colonize the conventionally feminine domain of sensibility" ("Romanticism" 13). Ironically, the modes of identification that were associated with women's literacy in the eighteenth century became the provenance of male Romantic writers – men who had, at times, disdain or ambivalence for the

domestic novel. Thus, this analysis of the domestic novel serves as a pre-history of Romantic thinking about subjectivity and reading.

The Public and Private Sphere

Traditionally, eighteenth-century subjectivity has been explained in terms of Jürgen Habermas's influential theory of the public sphere. Habermas outlined a history of eighteenth-century Europe that explained how middle-class men rejected the traditional authorities of church and state and developed the bourgeois public sphere, "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (27). These men created and maintained public physical and discursive spaces to mediate the conflicts between public authority and private family life, and in so doing, created a modern democracy, where ideas and arguments are traded between individuals, not unlike how the emerging capitalist marketplace traded commodities. For Habermas, the proliferation of printed texts, in particular the periodical and the novel, was crucial to the development of the public sphere:

The psychological novel fashioned for the first time the kind of realism that allowed anyone to enter into the literary action as a substitute for his own, to use the relationship between the figures, between the author, the characters, and the reader as substitute relationships for reality. (50)

Essentially, the novel and the bourgeois public sphere mirrored each other: both constructions reflected the other discourse's interests in collapsing class barriers, promoting open exchange of ideas, investigating the boundaries of private life, and confronting the difficult political questions of the age.

In Habermas's theory, an individual (usually male) maintains a public and a private identity: he is one man at home with his family and friends, and he represents these views when

he enters the public sphere.¹² Although women's influence was not restricted to the home, many considered the public sphere as an imagined community of men, not women. As women did not often patronize coffeehouses, salons, and public reading circles (although a number of similar activities occurred in eighteenth-century homes, hosted and participated in by women), Habermas's theory posits women as accessing the public sphere only through the medium of text, perhaps by reading one of the popular periodicals, magazines, leaflets, or chapbooks that comprised the discursive aspects of the public sphere. Whereas men traversed the boundaries of the public/private split in identity with few conflicts, women tended to portray these boundaries as problematic. In this project, I examine one such way that women expressed the difficulties of public and private feminine identities: the novelistic trope of the young woman entering and adapting to the public, or urban, fashionable society, from the relative comfort of private life in the country.

Drawing upon other analyses of late eighteenth-century female subjectivity, I find that women tend to problematize Habermas's theory. Mellor argues that women did not only participate in the public sphere as readers, but also circulated their views to construct, modify, and change the discourse in the public sphere (3). Over the past thirty years, the efforts of Mellor and other feminist scholars have uncovered the proliferation of public women who, for one reason or another, were previously lost to literary history. As we rethink how women contributed to public discourse, these feminist scholars argue that we also need to revisit how the eighteenth century defined subjectivity with regards to private and public identities. Here, too, Mellor's influential work helps revise Habermas's vision of the public/private split, as she argues that

¹² In this project, I also use the term "domestic identity" to refer to the ways that individuals – usually women – construct an image of who they are at home and in home-like places. Although not the case for every individual in the eighteenth century, the characters I talk about tend to perceive the home as a space for developing and "housing" a private, interior self.

women writers “represented a subjectivity that is fluid, absorptive, responsive, with permeable ego boundaries [...] this self typically locates its identity in its connections with a larger human group, whether the family or the social community” (87). Mellor and I agree that, by and large, eighteenth-century female subjectivity resists the binary of public versus private identity, and instead represents a personal, interior self that is capable of adapting and socializing in public and values those social connections. This description bears more than a passing similarity to the primarily *masculine* individual posited by Habermas as the cornerstone of the bourgeois public sphere: a subject who represents himself in public and private, and moreover maintains a fluid sense of self when traversing between these worlds. Thus, Nancy Armstrong’s argument that “the modern individual was first and foremost a woman” speaks not only to the ways in which women developed and represented interior selves, but also to a range of behaviors and identity constructs that enabled women to perceive themselves as public individuals and to reconcile those public selves with their identity as an individual woman (*Desire* 8). Less clear, however, is how eighteenth-century culture envisions this subject coming into being.

Social Identity

While women entering public society certainly tried to faithfully represent themselves, and perhaps even make others perceive them as unique, many novels document the need for women and men to feel like part of a group. Particularly for women seeking economic and personal support through marriage, maintaining a positive public reputation was crucial to social success. Thus, in addition to considering how to develop and maintain a fluid self capable of representing their identity in public and in private, eighteenth-century women increasingly thought about the concept of social identity, or affiliation or representation with regards to a

particular group (real, abstract, or discursive). Jake Harwood, a scholar of intergroup communication, summarizes the difference between personal and social identity:

At the individual (personal identity) level, we are concerned with our difference from other individuals, and the things that make us unique as people. At the collective (social identity) level, we are concerned with our group's differences from other groups, and the things that make our group unique. When operating at the level of social identity, individuals act as group members, understand and judge the behaviors of self and others in terms of group memberships, and tend to *deindividuate* both self and others. (84-85, emphasis in original)

While the aspects of myself that make me *me* are significant to my perceptions of myself, so too are the groups that I belong to. Depending on the situation, I may not define myself as an individual first and foremost; it may be more advantageous, easy, or appropriate to draw upon identity markers of one of my groups. Additionally, these lines between social identity and personal identity may be blurred, as it may not be clear whether or not I am reacting, thinking, behaving, reading, or writing in a given situation as my personal, interior self or in a way that reflects my group membership.

Eighteenth-century England has been described as an age of sociability, in which growing urbanization and the development of the public sphere forced the culture to try and understand the trends which drove more and more people into public economic and public intellectual commerce. Thus, social identity, a construct that accounts for an individual's representation of and relationship to a group, and public identity, a construct that accounts for an individual's representation of and relationship to various imagined publics, are central to the concerns of eighteenth-century writers.¹³ For some, social and public identities were determined

¹³ In this project, the terms social identity and public identity are used interchangeably, as the distinction between "society" and "public" is ambiguous, particularly for women in domestic novels. In Habermas's view, "public identity" would imply an investment in certain political or cultural debates, but as most feminist scholars agree, women's social and domestic discourse often has political or cultural implications.

by class, which in turn was determined from birth. These individuals were portrayed as “naturally” fitting into authoritative and powerful identity constructs, such as the categories of “polite society,” “aristocracy,” and “gentleman.”¹⁴ This perception of social identity as biologically inherent to an individual’s character contrasts with another strain of eighteenth-century thought, that which is characterized by the conduct book. Conduct books assumed that individuals could be taught to behave as members of a certain community. In novels like *Pamela*, the conduct book genre was appropriated by authors to show how individuals learned new social identities from the fictional worlds they inhabited. Thus, the novel functioned as an important locus of learned social identities for readers looking to take on or investigate new personas and new ways of being.

In most novels, readers observed the process of establishing social identity, or how fictional individuals positioned themselves amongst and between groups in the text. Sociologist Erving Goffman posited that all individuals – even those whose race, class, and/or gender afford them a certain amount of social clout – negotiate their *face*. He defined *face* as

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (299)

Goffman saw conversations as attempts by individuals to situate themselves with regards to what they and other individuals perceive as societal norms and acceptable behaviors. In this view, an individual’s social identity interacts with dominant social customs within a society, or what an individual perceives to be those dominant social customs. Thus, even embedded in conversations

¹⁴ As I explained in the section titled “Aesthetics, Taste, and the Subject,” Dror Wahrman argues that this line of thinking took shape over the course of the eighteenth century, particularly for the social identities that intersected with race, class, and gender.

that are not explicitly about social identity, social identity cannot be divorced from cultural structures of power and normative behavior.

Social identity's resonance reverberates on a variety of personal, societal, cultural, political, and universal levels; it functions as a surface or mask for the personal self at the same time it is integral to that subject. Understandably, the scope of social identity can be rather dizzying and full of paradoxes; however, complex views of the self are not limited to postmodern individuals. As Yorick remarks in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), "I am never so perfectly conscious of the existence of a soul within me, as when I am entangled in them" (94). What Yorick sees as "entanglement" might also be described as a representation of the multifaceted, complex subjectivity that the eighteenth century comes to define as "modern." If, as Lawrence Klein suggests, we look at eighteenth-century identity as "not an essence but rather a set of skills adapted to a range of environments, multiplicity and even inconsistency become the self's natural condition" (377). In keeping with the line of eighteenth-century thought that portrayed identity as a learned ability, Klein investigates the impact of *skills* on particularly difficult or complicated identity work, an interest I share. In particular, I examine another set of skills that became significant to the development of eighteenth-century women's social identities: literacy.

Reading and the Reader

Although scholars engage in the reading process quite often (right this moment, for instance!), few stop to consider the inner workings of this process. Experienced readers in English tend to move their eyes from left to right across the page, jumping forward in bursts of about eight letters, stopping to examine information more closely, and occasionally returning to

earlier material (Wolf 148). Peripherally, we see about fourteen to fifteen letters ahead of our current focus, allowing the brain to predict upcoming information (Wolf 148). Recent studies have suggested that hypertext readers move more rapidly down the page, abbreviating the left-to-right lines that characterize readers of the print text (Nielsen). In the reader's brain, several different regions activate to process the information taken in by the eyes: the limbic region, associated with the ability to feel emotion; the ventral route, a pathway in the left hemisphere between cognitive and visual areas of the brain; the hippocampus, thought to be the seat of long-term memory; and Broca's area, a processing center for language and speech, to name a few (Wolf 140-155).¹⁵ All of these events occur within milliseconds, a process that seems more astonishing when the material conditions for reading are included – a reader might be listening to music, watching a child play, tapping a foot, or worrying about an upcoming event. Child development professor Maryanne Wolf remarks, “Once we begin to grasp what is required for our brains to read a single word, we can't help asking how in the world we read whole sentences and paragraphs, let alone whole books” (155). And, I might add, we also wonder how in the world we could enjoy this process and attach great significance to what we read.

¹⁵ Wolf also reports on an intriguing study which found that literate and non-literate individuals processed language differently in the brain: non-literate individuals used the frontal lobe, whereas literate individuals used the temporal lobe (151). As neuroscientists discover how the brain physically changes as a result of learning how to read, literacy scholars are more ambivalent about the changes in cognition believed to result from literacy. Walter Ong argued that literacy, particularly writing, restructures the way subjects think, opening them up to “the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials” (23), but his work has since been refuted by research like Scribner and Cole's study of the Vai people, which found that cognitive differences among literate people were due to schooling, not to literacy itself. I tend to agree with F. Niyi Akinnaso, who writes in his essay on being one of the only literate people in his Nigerian community that literacy affects the “symbiotic relationship between mental and sociocultural processes,” rather than simply the cognitive abilities of the reading subject (138).

To make sense of what they read, experienced readers employ several cognitive and literacy skills related to association, emotion, and order.¹⁶ Reading expert Richard Vacca explains that the development of “strategic readers” depends upon becoming

readers who know how to activate prior knowledge before, during, and after reading, to decide what’s important in a text, to synthesize information, to draw inferences during and after reading, to ask questions, and to self-monitor and repair faulty comprehension. (qtd. in Wolf 138).

An individual’s perception of reading material is heavily influenced by the world outside the text: the reader’s purpose for reading; physical, temporal, and rhetorical situations in which the reader reads; and the reader’s previous experiences with similar texts and topic material.

Experienced readers associate what they read with other information; they read subtext, which means using skills in inference, analogy, figurative language, and irony. As anyone who has tried to teach reading knows, emotional attachment to what readers read is also important to their comprehension of the text. Generally, readers benefit from their own identification with characters and places in the text, and the encouragement they receive from other readers is also crucial to their success. Moreover, experienced readers construct mental scaffolding for the texts that they read, linking concepts, sentences, previous knowledge, inferences, and suppositions in an attempt to create some type of order out of the printed word. Working memory helps readers store information about the text, and meta-cognitive abilities help readers know when they have misunderstood or not fully understood what they have read.

Although the contributions of cognitive science have been very helpful in understanding how we read, there are fewer scholarly frameworks for understanding the everyday phenomenology of reading. Reader-response theorist Wolfgang Iser hypothesized that the experience of reading produced a split in the reader’s subjectivity:

¹⁶ For more, see Charney and Adams.

Text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the ‘division’ takes place within the reader himself. [...] As we read there occurs an artificial division of our personality, because we take as a theme for ourselves something we are not. (90)

In Iser’s figure of the reader, I see traces of the eighteenth century’s “modern individual,” who Mellor describes as “fluid, absorptive, responsive, with permeable ego boundaries” (87). While narratives of the rise of the novel often suggest that the genre developed and codified a particular kind of self, accounts of reading suggest that the self is necessarily evolving and changing, as the act of reading entails feeling, perhaps unconsciously, like the reader is at least two different people. Thus, underneath the eighteenth century’s attempts to stabilize a “modern individual” (and the twenty-first century’s attempts to understand that “modern individual”), I map out how the experiences of readers represented in the text complicate the kinds of identity-work that come to characterize what it means to be a subject.

The Rise of the Novel

In Ian Watt’s groundbreaking narration of the rise of the novel, eighteenth-century English culture embraced the novel because it accurately captured their interests in realism, individual psychology, and unique private lives. He argued that these changes were brought about by social and economic shifts in society spurred on by the rise of the middle class and the “great power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole” (65). However, as noted above, significant gains in literacy rates happened early in the seventeenth century and late in the nineteenth, neatly bookending the period which Watt purports saw social changes bring new readers to the novel. Other scholars have picked up on the problems in Watt’s theory, including Jan Fergus, whose analysis of bookshop records concludes that “novels were not as popular, and the tastes of male and female readers of all classes were not as distinct, as many scholars have

supposed – or as many eighteenth-century critics alleged” (“Women Readers” 157). In contrast to Watt’s characterization of the early and mid-eighteenth century as the era of the novel, Fergus pinpoints the growth in novel-reading amongst women outside London beginning – not peaking – around 1770. Therefore, my discussion of the ways in which the novel defined itself as a genre has to take into account not only the social changes that might have attracted readers to the novel, but also the historical conditions that monitored access to literacy.

Other accounts of the rise of the novel have also considered how discourse about literacy and books contribute to the definition of the genre as a whole. Cultural historian Patrick Brantlinger argues, “The inscription of anti-novel attitudes within novels is so common that it can be understood as a defining feature of the genre” (2). In his examination of nineteenth-century British literature, Brantlinger claims that fears and anxiety over mass literacy formed just as much a part of the novel’s appeal as it did its criticism. Similarly, Laurie Langbauer observes that the novel appropriates the discourse it purports to reject, suggesting that “the novel needs romance in order to give it the appearance of identity and meaning” (3). This project began with the hypothesis that the novel needs not only the romance but the romance *reader* to justify the rise of the novel. Other scholars have also noted the importance of the relationship between the figure of the reader in the text and the reader outside of the text, such as Carla Peterson, who examines the figure of the nineteenth century reader; Jon Klancher, who discusses periodical audiences in the post-French Revolution era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; and Lucy Newlyn, who analyzes authorial anxiety.

My project explores the intersection of sensibility, social identity, and literacy practices among representations of readers in the mid- to late eighteenth-century British novel. The first chapter argues that, in Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote*, Arabella’s exploits demonstrate

the need for social literacy, figured in this novel as the ability to “read” society in terms of power relationships and social hierarchies. I also investigate how Lennox positions the process of reading the world as analogous to reading the developing genre of the novel. The second chapter argues that Frances Burney’s *Evelina* considers women’s ability to read others as essential, but, in seeing literacy as a type of performance, rejects women who incorporate literate ways of knowing and thinking into their identity. Moreover, Burney uses her novel to describe ideal selfhood in terms of literacy practices, implying that the public self functions as a metaphor which signifies but does not reveal the private self. Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, which I examine in the third chapter, blurs eighteenth-century notions of the boundary between private and public selves for women, and my reading of this novel employs the metaphor of identity borderlands to describe the effects literacy has on concepts of identity. In the fourth chapter, I revisit the figure of the female Quixote in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, and I argue that this novel assembles a self that functions as a nexus for various social identities, in contrast to earlier models of a private, interior self. Drawing upon scholarship that investigates the mutually constitutive rise of the novel and modern subjectivity, as well as the concepts and terminology of new literacy studies, the first four chapters of my project examine how the eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility and aesthetic taste intertwine with the act of reading in order to negotiate new borderlands between women’s individual and social identities. I argue that we should consider the history of reading as documenting the rise of social identity formation.

In the final chapter of my project, I draw upon the work Alan Richardson did with Romantic-era culture and its influence on contemporary American education in *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice*. Richardson suggests that changes in schooling and literacy in the Romantic era underpin the way we understand literature’s role in

the educational curriculum today. Similarly, I argue that eighteenth-century interactions between social identity and literacy practices should be reinvigorated in the twenty-first century literature curriculum. I reflect upon my first-year composition course that incorporated students' engagement with the popular *Twilight* series, and I examine how their social identity as readers of these books impacted their perception of themselves as academic readers and writers.

Chapter One

Quixotic Romanticism: English Social Literacy in *The Female Quixote*

In Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, the protagonist Arabella immerses herself in the world of romantic literature, where gallant men and grand women conform to an archaic hierarchy. Her conflation of the romantic world with the practical and sensible mindset of 18th-century English society raises the question of how texts, particularly fictitious ones, train people to "read" the world around them. Like her fellow voracious reader Don Quixote, Arabella's problems stem from her failure to recognize the difference between text and reality. However, this novel aims not only to tame the wayward female Quixote, but also to domesticate her by assuming the role of a proper English wife. In asserting that works of romance do not provide a suitable model for modern, respectable femininity, Lennox positions herself as a writer who can imagine how to animate good feminine subjects in a novel. In the process of attempting to meet this challenge, *The Female Quixote* engages and questions models of reader subjectivity; additionally, it talks about living in society as a specifically *literate* activity.

Indeed, many readers of the novel validate the reality espoused by the sage, well-read Doctor, who enters in the penultimate chapter to "cure" Arabella of her romantic ways, telling her that "nothing is more different from a human Being, than Heroes or Heroines" (380).¹⁷ The Doctor calls her favorite romances volumes "with which Children are sometimes injudiciously suffer'd to amuse their Imaginations; but which I little expected to hear quoted by your Ladyship in a serious Discourse" (374). Proper books, he argues, will provide "an Antidote to Example" (380), in order to teach young ladies the proper morals. On the surface, Lennox's text appears to

¹⁷ All quotations from the text are from the second edition of *The Female Quixote* (1752).

engage with and then settle questions about how the modern novel, as opposed to the antiquated, feminine romance, informs readers' perceptions of reality.¹⁸

However, recent critics have argued that the romances themselves are not the source of Arabella's problematic behavior; in *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel*, Laurie Langbauer states that *The Female Quixote* "attests to a tacit recognition that the problems of romance are the problems of fiction, and of the novel as well" (64).¹⁹ Ellen Gardiner suggests that Lennox places the social disorder in society itself, which uses "romance as a tool with which to exclude readers and writers from participation in the new profession of literary reviewership on the basis of class and gender" (1). Seeing further problems in the novel's representation of literacy, Mary Patricia Martin argues that *The Female Quixote* "uses both romance and novel to expose the gendered rhetoric of the dominant discourse," making space for Lennox to "[claim] the novel, too, as 'women's writing'" (46).²⁰ These interpretations of the

¹⁸ Kathryn Shevelow traces the close relationship between readers' lives and the print periodical in her book *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical*. Shevelow points to the periodical's call for audience involvement and their ability to report on events happening in their readers' lives as factors which allowed the periodical to shape and revise the norms of feminine representation. When reading novels of the first half of the eighteenth century, Shevelow's work reminds scholars that the novel would not have been seen as a completely alien creature to an audience already familiar with the periodical, which also blended fact and fiction.

¹⁹ Langbauer's larger argument is that the novel scapegoats the romance, "deploying the term in an attempt to draw off contradictions and problems of coherence that undermine the novel's incorporation" (3). My concern with *The Female Quixote* is not about the form the novel takes as it develops into the genre we recognize today, but rather the questions surrounding its usage and purpose for readers. Both Langbauer and I agree that Lennox's inclusion of the romance genre in this novel is a way of asking how women themselves can represent others and be represented themselves in the novel.

²⁰ Biographical readings of Arabella as representative of Lennox herself are difficult to make, since very little is known about the author's personal life. However, Kate Levin argues that Lennox reforms Arabella as a way of "dramatiz[ing] and advertis[ing] her own literary reform" (275) after a string of early, bad work. In this reading, Arabella's entrance into society is a parallel to Lennox's entrance into a society of writers. While to some extent true, I prefer to think of Lennox as the authority figure over Arabella instead of Arabella herself.

novel suggest that Lennox's portrayal of Arabella as a bad subject is influenced by generic problems: how the emerging novel incorporates other genres (like the romance, perceived by many as a particularly feminine mode of expression) into the form of the novel readers recognize today.

While the question of genre certainly informs *The Female Quixote*, Lennox expands the scope of literacy to include not only genre but context - to "read" society in terms of the often unequal relationship between the object of interpretation and the reading subject. That is, the novel shows that just as the reader holds power over the interpretation of the text, so do men who "read" women as a means of protecting their authority as patriarchal powers and ensuring women remain in a state of social and sexual objectification. In response to this framework of a rather unromantic modern England, Lennox negotiates the conflicting positions of women's subjectivity in public space as a means of promoting social literacy, the ability to "read" society in terms of power relationships and social hierarchies.

The problem I focus on in this chapter is not simply due to what Arabella reads (romances) nor the material conditions of her reading (isolation from modern England), but how these influences enable her to construct the subjectivity of a reader. Arabella's father, the Marquis, "never admitted any Company whatever" (6), and after her mother's death, Arabella was "permitted [...] to receive no Part of her Education from another, which he was capable of giving her himself" (6).²¹ Her physical and educational solitude exacerbates her textual solitude, for Arabella reads only a "great Store of Romances, and, what was still more unfortunate, not in

²¹ For more on women's education in the eighteenth century, see Augustin.

the original *French*, but very bad Translations” (7).²² Undoubtedly, these romances warp Arabella’s worldview later in the novel, and a cursory examination of the novel would suggest that romances themselves prey upon unsuspecting, lonely female readers, twisting their interpretations of proper behavior into romantic delusions. Yet the isolated reading of the romance’s content does not necessarily lead to Arabella’s misreading in entirety; indeed, as Sharon Smith Palo points out, the romance allows Arabella later in the novel to “exercise a transformative influence over this society” (223).²³ Moreover, Arabella’s unique viewpoint and store of knowledge lead her to develop values such as compassion, self-respect, and virtue.²⁴ While important to her mindset, romance and isolation are not the only instigators of her quixotic vision.

More troubling is the model of a reader’s subjectivity that stems from Arabella’s isolated consumption of romances. Lennox’s narrator tells the reader that Arabella’s “Retirement” left her unable to understand how “any Solitude could be obscure enough to conceal a Beauty like hers from Notice; and thought the Reputation of her Charms sufficient to bring a Croud of Adorers to demand her of her Father” (7-8). In this satirical reading of her own body through the eyes of an imagined public, Arabella reflects upon her status as a representation. Arabella reads herself through the eyes of an imagined public and concludes that she should be powerful

²²This joke probably had additional significance for Lennox, who translated a number of works herself, including a volume of sources for Shakespeare’s plays. For more on her translations, see Small.

²³ Smith Palo also points out that Lennox writes *The Female Quixote* after several other fiction and non-fiction writers represent similar romance readers in their works. This tradition suggests that Lennox expands upon a popular trope in the culture, rather than criticizing romances for the sake of criticizing romances.

²⁴ Lennox did not only represent women’s education in her novels, she founded a magazine, *Lady’s Museum*, which aimed to teach women “in the very notion of being a woman itself” (Shevelow *Women* 184). For more on Lennox’s educational purpose for the magazine, see Shevelow, “‘C—L--’ to ‘Mrs. Stanhope’: A Preview of Charlotte Lennox’s *The Lady’s Museum*.”

because her body is an object of attention for that public, specifically men in search of a sexual partner. For example, when potential suitor Mr. Hervey desires to “have a nearer View” (19) and the gardener Edward “gaze[s] on her very attentively” (22), Arabella interprets this attention as an acknowledgement of her power and expresses that power by ordering them around and banishing them from her presence. She conflates romantic desire for her person with the men’s recognition of her own importance, and in the case of Edward, completely fabricates both feelings. Even though Arabella expresses some discomfort with being the object of men’s gazes, she projects this uneasiness in order to restore herself to the position of higher power:

This Veil had never appeared to her so necessary before. Mr. *Hervey’s* eager Glances threw her into so much Confusion, that, pulling it over her Face as much as she was able, she remained invisible to him all the time they afterwards stayed in the Church. This Action, by which she would have had him understand that she was displeas’d at his gazing on her with so little Respect, only increased his Curiosity to know who she was. (9)

Arabella intends her retreat into her veil to remind Mr. Hervey of her right to his respect and of her position as the administrator of power in this relationship. From Arabella’s perspective, the object being read has a certain amount of control over her reception by readers; moreover, readers can be prompted to reconsider their opinion of the “text” by the text itself.

However, Arabella’s reading of her own power is misguided. Her actions with the veil draw Mr. Hervey’s curious gaze even farther in, and her position as object of the gaze leads Mr. Hervey to evaluate her worth and investigate ways to hold power over her. After seeing her rich carriage and fine dress, he “conceived a much higher Idea of her Quality than he had at first,” and after finding out from other churchgoers that she has been raised “in Obscurity,” he concludes that “it would not be difficult to persuade her to free herself by Marriage” (9). As Mr. Hervey’s gaze “reads” the text of Arabella’s body, his inner monologue reveals two important assumptions he makes about the balance of power between men and women: his observations

about her appearance correctly establish her current social status, and his understanding of that status will make it possible for him to exploit her for his own economic well-being – that is, he could marry her. Through Mr. Hervey’s production of meaning from the text of Arabella’s body, Lennox shows how the act of reading in England is underscored by exchanges of power that could potentially deny objectified women the full possession of their public identity and subjectivity.²⁵

Mr. Hervey’s strategies for “reading” Arabella align with some contemporary notions about the objectification of women’s bodies in 18th-century consumer culture. As modernity developed, ideas about the objectification of bodies and the placement of those bodies in a public spectacle changed, as Erin Labbie explains:

During the mideighteenth century, gender roles and constructs, previously maintained as social categories, became invested with a categorically ontological rigidity. The shift brought with it a new focus on female sartorial ornamentation and a commodification of fashion markers. In other words, as women’s ontological status began to inhabit their social status, making evident a collapse between interiority and exteriority, as well as surface and depth, which continues to be at work today, a perception of women as sites and objects of exchange began to be expressed through increasing commodification and distribution of fashion and its hygienic paraphernalia. (80)

Whereas in Arabella’s *romances* women may have been powerful because of their bodies’ objectification, the same is not necessarily true of Arabella’s modern *society*. When women make spectacles of themselves in a consumer society, they grant others (like Mr. Hervey) power over themselves, permitting themselves to serve as “sites and objects of exchange” for the interpretations of other people in society rather than as sites for their own subjectivity, as

²⁵ The development of the public and private selves of women over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into what would become the idealized domestic figure of the “angel in the house” is well documented by many feminist scholars. Further information about the growth of this figure can be found in Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Kathryn Shevelov’s *Women and Print Culture*, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Arabella thinks. While no character in the novel directly expresses these views, the bad subjects – particularly Arabella – delineate the changes in social behavior. While Labbie ties this shift in the perception of women to fashion and the expression of one's good taste, Lennox's novel explores how literacy serves as a vehicle for the culture's interpretation of the public reception and reputation of a woman.

In this light, Arabella's fright over Mr. Hervey is not nearly so far off base. When Mr. Hervey rides up to her, her "Imagination immediately suggested to her, that this insolent Lover had a Design to seize her Person" (19), and in a sense, he does. As he "reads" Arabella, he sets events in motion that threaten to seize her person in the form of her subjectivity. Certainly, Arabella's concerns about the physical seizure of her person are unfounded, but the seizure of her identity through marriage is imminent. As a woman entering the marriage market, Arabella inhabits a space in which her status as a commodity becomes intertwined with her identity as a woman, making her the type of accomplished figure Ann Bermingham argues "raised the specter of false consciousness" in late 18th-century novels (496). In Bermingham's view, Arabella is the type of woman whose achievements and appearance reflect back the desires of men; the mid-eighteenth century tended to represent eligible women as particularly problematic when women developed their subject formation as a result of what men wanted out of them; Bermingham's figure helps clarify how Arabella's resistance to Mr. Hervey is a resistance to not only modern ways of reading and being read by society, but also the lack of selfhood implied by these actions.²⁶ Undoubtedly, Arabella has an overblown view of her own power, but the satirical portrait of her contains an undercurrent of fear about women's status as subjects.

²⁶ Bermingham's article draws heavily upon her reading of the Miss Beauforts in Austen's *Sanditon* as an example of the accomplished woman who unsettles notions of subjectivity. She adds that Austen's heroines tend to view their accomplishments as activities for their own private

In this way, Arabella unwittingly opposes contemporary views of courtship. As modern society writes fictitious, romantic ideologies over the exchanges of power that occur over the course of a courtship, Lennox has her protagonist humorously defy that fiction. As Catherine Gallagher notes, this reading of the novel turns around the conventional interpretation of the novel in that Arabella “*does* resist fiction, a fact that has not generally been noticed; indeed, most commentators take her to be resisting reality” (175-176). Yet the question here is, how is it helpful to show a protagonist comically and inadvertently resisting such traditional notions of romance and womanhood? Ultimately, Arabella’s adventures help readers decode how society interprets the value, both economic and moral, of its members. By living out her own reality and provoking extreme reactions from other characters in the novel, Arabella’s resistance to convention allows her reader to trace the discursive threads of English society and to delineate the ways that English culture processes power, reading, and femininity.

As Arabella’s reading moves from the text of her romances to the context of her society, her misreading of the power structures in England becomes more apparent. When Arabella’s “Attention [is] immediately engaged” by another woman at church, she responds by reading subjectivity into Miss Groves’s appearance:

her Stature was above the ordinary Size of Women; and, being rather too plump to be delicate, her Mien was so majestic, and such an Air of Grandeur was diffused over her whole Person, joined to the Charms of a very lovely Face. (67)

As Arabella describes her, Miss Groves’s tall stature and curious plumpness are conflated with her “majestic” bearing, her “Air of Grandeur,” and the “Charms” of her face. Arabella associates society’s attention to Miss Groves with society’s acknowledgement of her commanding

fulfillment rather than as public displays on the marriage market. Similarly, literacy’s position as both public discourse and private source of entertainment makes it a particularly useful lens into the culture’s debates over women’s subjectivity and domesticity.

presence. In her delusion, she reads Miss Groves and inscribes the language of power over her body, the object Arabella thinks controls the gaze of men and requires them to respect women.

However, Miss Groves's companion Mrs. Morris informs Arabella that the female body is the root of Miss Groves's subjection, not her subjectivity:

I need not tell you, Madam, that my Lady was a celebrated Beauty: You have yourself been pleased to say, that she is very handsome. When she first appeared at Court, her Beauty, and the uncommon Dignity of her Person, at such early Years, made her the Object of general Admiration. (74)

But, as Miss Groves finds out, women who draw the gaze to their bodies confirm men's power over them. The same "Object of general Admiration" has sex with Mr. L., and as Mrs. Morris reports, when "[h]er Story became generally known, [...] [s]he was shunned and neglected by every body" (75). When Miss Groves displays her body to a group of unromantic English readers, she opens herself up to misinterpretation and a loss of social status and power. Good readers in this culture, Lennox implies, understand that women's actions are interpreted not only by their own legitimate reasoning, but also by the authority of men, who tend to control the consequences of bad representation.

Arabella seems to understand how the public penalizes wayward women, but she does not account for the impact social class can make on women at the center of the spectacle. For example, she reads Miss Groves's story in the context of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, people far more powerful than Miss Groves, a fallen woman pregnant for the second time out of wedlock:

Your Lady's Case, said she, is much to be lamented; and greatly resembles the unfortunate *Cleopatra's*, whom *Julius Caesar* privately marrying, with a Promise to own her for his Wife, when he should be peaceable Master of the *Roman* Empire, left that great Queen big with Child, and, never intending to perform his Promise, suffered her to be exposed to the Censures the World has so freely cast upon her; and which she so little deserved. (77)

Although Arabella considers how other people read Cleopatra's story, her conflation of Cleopatra and Miss Groves suggests that she views their positions in the social hierarchy as one and the same. This interpretation marks her as sufficiently Quixotic by being unable to read the world around her, but it also enables her to be sympathetic towards both women. The scorn which Cleopatra "so little deserved," in Arabella's view at least, was heaped upon Miss Groves, whose reputation "was pretty severely handled by her Enemies" (75), Mrs. Morris adds. Lennox implies that a shift in Arabella's literacy skills towards an understanding of class and society will perhaps bring about a shift in her ability to feel sympathy for others.

Yet Lennox also emphasizes the need for this shift near the end of the novel, when Arabella's position bears a striking resemblance to the position of two women who are associated with the spectacle, prostitution, and scandal. First, at the pump-house, Arabella claims that people "either took me for some Princess of the Name of *Julia*, who is expected here to-Night, or else flatter me with some Resemblance to the beautiful Daughter of *Augustus*" (272). Her suitor Mr. Selvin points out that Julia "was, pardon the Expression, the most abandon'd Prostitute in *Rome*" (273). When Arabella goes to London, she finds herself an object of attention for the public:

The Singularity of her Dress, for she was cover'd with her Veil, drew a Number of Gazers after her, who prest round her with so little Respect, that she was greatly embarrass'd, and had Thoughts of quitting the Place, delightful as she own'd it, immediately, when her Attention was holly engross'd by an Adventure in which she soon interested herself very deeply. (334)

The narrator explains the "Adventure": a navy officer's mistress (Lucy) has been dressed as a man, but has failed to police her body properly and thus has been discovered. Despite the woman's intended interpretation of her identity as a man, her slightly intoxicated state gives her true identity away. Arabella's interpretation of the woman as an "unfortunate Fair One" (335)

leads her to unveil herself while rushing to Lucy's aid, an act that "attract[s] every Person's Attention and Respect" (335).²⁷ The similarity between Arabella, Julia, and Lucy the prostitute in their position as the center of the spectacle outlines what is at stake here: a woman's control of her identity and her sympathy for other people, and on the other hand, her acceptance by her community and her reputation as a virtuous woman.

This problem is framed by important ways in which 18th-century English society interprets gender, the body, and social control, historical shifts articulated by Michel Foucault in his theory of discipline. Broadly speaking, according to Foucault in the historical period represented by Arabella's romances, punishment occurred through the spectacle, a situation where power was displayed through bodies punished in public. Authorities used public exhibitions of torture - such as lynching, beheading, quartering, and burning at the stake - as a means of reaffirming their power over the people and educating the public about the consequences of certain crimes (Foucault 7, 12-13, 32-69). The body in the spectacle served as a political statement about the relationship between offenders of the social order, the spectators, and the state: "The body, several times tortured, provides the synthesis of the reality of the deeds and the truth of the investigation, of the documents of the case and the statements of the criminal, of the crime and the punishment" (47). While not an exact equivalent to Arabella's perception of the spectacle, Foucault's theory frames her view of the world in terms of antiquated forms of power. As Arabella's experiences with Mr. Hervey and Miss Groves show, she feels that bodies (particularly hers) can change how other people interpret their individual situation.

²⁷ Deborah Ross holds that "in Lennox's view, the social hierarchy found in the real world needs no correction" (460), yet Arabella's compassionate treatment of the prostitute who is so cruelly scorned by her society surely serves as Lennox's critique on society's treatment of objectified women.

However, Foucault adds, over the course of the 18th century European modes of discipline begin to occur in private spaces with individual offenders:²⁸

[Punishment] leaves the domain of more or less everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness; its effectiveness is seen as resulting from its inevitability, not from its visible intensity; it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime; the exemplary mechanics of punishment changes its mechanisms. (9)

In tracing how punishment and discipline came to be considered essential elements of being a good subject, Foucault outlines a key shift in how subjects have to “read” other members of their society. Rather than focusing on a central “text” to determine what or what not to do, individuals internalize the norms of their society; good discipline is maintained by interpreting the behaviors of others, determining what actions are more likely to bring punishment, and adjusting their public performance accordingly. As many scholars have pointed out, these modes of discipline seem to be located in or around the female subject. Arabella’s companion Charlotte Glanville seems to understand the public/private split of her subjectivity, as she bristles when Arabella compliments her on her “Opportunities of making [her]self beloved [... to] a greater Number of Admirers” (87). Charlotte resents this characterization of herself as an object of the gaze, responding “I never granted a Kiss without a great deal of Confusion” (89). Charlotte’s subjectivity is intertwined with her body, and her knowledge about society shows that neither should be open to the public. While Arabella interprets power as residing in bodies, the modern society starts to see the body as an intermediary,²⁹ and the real authorities see bodies as a site for the exchange of knowledge through which they can perpetuate their social systems (Foucault 9, 11, 14-16).

²⁸ For more on how this dissertation intersects with Habermas’s ideas about the public sphere, see the Introduction.

²⁹ See Foucault 11 for more about this subject, and see also his chapter “The Means of Correct Punishment” for a discussion of these ideas in the context of the educational system.

The problem Arabella needs to solve – and the problem Lennox examines in the latter half of the novel – is how women should “write,” or interact with their society so as to be interpreted in the way that they would like to be interpreted. The issues Arabella has previously had with reading broaden, for this part of the novel sees Lennox linking a woman writer’s control over her own body and text with the potential that writer has for influencing her own reception in the public sphere. Of course, Arabella’s conception of a reader’s subjectivity reveals how willingly she would forfeit control over her identity, and thereby forfeit her public authority. When she instructs her maid Lucy to relate Arabella’s history to her suitor Sir George, Arabella reveals how she thinks an intimate story of a woman should enter the public sphere:

Recount all my Words and Actions, even the smallest and most inconsiderable, but also all my Thoughts, however instantaneous; relate exactly every Change of my Countenance; remember all my Smiles, Half-Smiles, Blushes, Turnings pale, Glances, Pauses, Full-stops, Interruptions; the Rise and Falling of my Voice; every Motion of my Eyes; and every Gesture which I have used for these Ten Years past; nor omit the smallest Circumstance that relates to me. (122)

Arabella sees her own story in both minute and intimate terms: Lucy would have to be very close to Arabella’s body indeed to record the “Motion of [her] Eyes” and “exactly every Change of [her] Countenance.” If she were to bring this story into the public sphere, the public’s perspective on her body would amplify many of her flaws. In animating this ludicrous tale of Arabella’s, Lennox’s novel appears to reinforce the status quo: entering the public sphere places women in a position that risks injury to her intimate self.

On the other hand, some critics have rejected this theory of the novel’s conservatism, preferring to see Arabella as a character who unmask the domestic ideologies of 18th-century England – not unlike Lennox herself. As Labbie argues, “By making visible the means by which the female subject is exploited, made the pure object of the scopic gaze, and commodified through the gaze, those means of exploitation are disarmed” (86). In this view, Lennox’s only

means of rebellion or radical reaction is representation of and consequential avoidance of the gaze. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that Arabella's interactions with Mr. Hervey perform a similar function of uncovering the ways in which English culture uses the gaze to discipline women, but I think the novel as a whole is less clear about overcoming the exploitation made possible through the gaze. That is, *The Female Quixote* does not animate the sort of subjectivity which could operate in public while maintaining an identity cohesive with one's domestic life *and* without being misinterpreted by others. In a sense, Lennox's novel requires one of the most critical reading skills of all: to imagine a subject that does not yet exist. The Quixote thus becomes a literacy educator: her job is to test the boundaries of respectable subjectivity, and her facetious readings of her world train her reader to judge how a subject *could* operate in her situation, if that subject possessed the ability to accurately read her society.

Arabella's world widens when she and the Glanvilles go to Bath at the end of the novel, and her appearance enables her reader to understand how societies work. Arabella first visits the pump-room dressed in "something like a Veil, of black Gauze, which covered almost all her Face, and Part of her Waist, and gave her a very singular Appearance" (262). Her ridiculous costume makes her the object of others' discourse:

The Attention of most Part of the Company was immediately engaged by the Appearance Lady *Bella* made. Strangers are here most strictly criticized, and every new Object affords a delicious Feast of Raillery and Scandal. (262)

Lennox specifically places Arabella as the spectacle, the object of a communal reading, wherein members of society attempt to "read" Arabella and make judgments about her character. Her unusual costume draws a number of outrageous interpretations, such as a Scottish lady and a Spanish nun. Luckily for Arabella, the men in the room hear about her wealth and "found greater Beauties to admire in her Person" (263), but the women of the room "dropt their Ridicule on her

Dress” (264). Arabella’s position as the center of attention produces two not entirely unlike readings by the different genders. The men sexualize Arabella the object, actively searching for “greater Beauties” in her body to make her more palatable as a future mate.³⁰ The women satirize her by “drop[ping] their Ridicule” on her body.³¹ Both groups’ verbs, “finding” and “dropping,” suggest an active conceptualization of Arabella.

However, Arabella’s next appearance in society involves a different dress and a different reaction. This costume is in the style of her conception of antiquated romances:

She wore no Hoop, and the Blue and Silver Stuff of her Robe, was only kept by its own Richness, from hanging close about her. It was quite open round her Breast, which was shaded with a rich Border of Lace; and clasping close to her Waist, by small Knots of Diamonds, descending in a sweeping Train on the Ground. The Sleeves were short, wide, and slashed, fastned in different Places with Diamonds, and her Arms were partly hid by half a Dozen Falls of Ruffles. Her Hair, which fell in very easy Ringlets on her Neck, was plac’d with great Care and Exactness round her lovely Face; and the Jewels and Ribbons, which were all her Head-dress, dispos’d to the greatest Advantage. (271)

Arabella’s exterior is marked by signifiers of her wealth: the “Richness” of her robe, a “rich Border of Lace,” “small Knots of Diamonds” on the border and on her sleeves, and “Jewels and Ribbons” in her hair. Even though she is the object of attention in Bath society, she has an additional source of legitimacy and power: class and riches. In her full sexual and economic display, Arabella exposes her body to the public, but she now shows her power in such a way that society recognizes her worth. Perhaps, some readers might think, Arabella finally seems to

³⁰ Thomas H. Schmid argues that Arabella “unwittingly serves the very aims of male specularization, giving the male viewers [...] everything about which to fantasize, to build their own romances” (29). I agree that the men’s desires are constructions and Arabella serves as a space for that construction, but would prefer to explore the impact of this scenario on the reader, who can see the entire spectrum of the exchange of power.

³¹ The women in the room also compare Arabella to other women of their circle who also have “inexcusable” whims, such as riding astride a horse and inventing titles (264).

understand herself as a text because she represents herself as a wholly commercial object, uniting her economic worth with her presentation of herself as a subject.

In this situation, she gets a markedly different reaction from the public, who interpret her in a more favorable light than before:

Scarce had the first tumultuous Whisper escap'd the Lips of each Individual, when they found themselves aw'd to Respect by that irresistible Charm in the Person of *Arabella*, which commanded Reverence and Love from all who beheld her. (272)

The members of the community react favorably to Arabella's performance because she exhibits her body in a context conducive to modern societal norms. Arabella fulfills the position of an objectified woman, but her markers of class and wealth make her a very valuable object. Lennox frames this scene as a moment in which society can see Arabella's true self, and she commands the respect that has been missing throughout the novel.³² The difference between this display and the earlier costume reveals one way to combat the gaze: if Arabella can accurately wield her wealth and class, she can make society interpret those signifiers in terms of her manners and inner self, and ultimately can help society shape their customs. By comparing the appearance of the two dresses and including opposite reactions by other members of Arabella's society, Lennox introduces the idea that the truthful representation of wealth and power matter greatly to an individual's reception in public.³³

³² Langbauer sees this situation as the novel trying on the mask of a romance, an uneasy moment where the novel confronts what it has been denying that it is (67). Certainly, Arabella's display here is unsettling at the same time that it is potentially empowering.

³³ Scott Paul Gordon would negate this examination of Arabella's power, since he thinks that "[a]ssessing whether Arabella is powerful or powerless, then, pursues the wrong question: Arabella exercises immense power without any consciousness of doing so" (506). Regardless if Arabella wields her power consciously or not, I argue that Lennox the author places Arabella in situations of power to teach her reader how to be socially literate. Gordon's article, "The Space of Romance in Lennox's *Female Quixote*," concludes that Lennox wishes to rescue certain romantic values like disinterestedness from the romance and assert their value in modern society.

Presumably, the wealthy Countess would be a suitable role model for a respectable spectacle, but she is unable to help Arabella with her problem.³⁴ One of the most ambiguous characters in the novel, The Countess appears to support Arabella's madness by answering her greeting with a language "so conformable" (325) to her romances. In contrast with the other characters who reject Arabella, the Countess initially aligns herself with the bad subject. However, once Arabella brings up singular women who made spectacles of themselves in her romances, the Countess tells her that "one cannot help rejoicing that we live in an Age in which the Customs, Manners, Habits, and Inclinations differ so widely from theirs, that 'tis impossible such Adventures should even happen" (326). Using her common ground with Arabella, the Countess persuades her that times have changed, and the society that once read these romances no longer exists. Here, the Countess shows that, unlike Arabella, she is able to distinguish the types of things that happen in old books and the types of things that happen in the modern world. On one hand, she appears to be the type of reader that the novel is attempting to construct.

On the other hand, Lennox shows how the Countess has internalized the gaze of society by demonstrating how much she has assumed the roles others have defined for her. She continues to stress feminine community when Arabella asks her for her history, or a "Recital of her Adventures" (327). The Countess responds by telling the younger woman the story of her life:

The Word Adventures carries in it so free and licentious a Sound in the Apprehensions of People at this Period of Time, that it can hardly with Propriety

Above all, I contend that Lennox's satiric mode asks readers to be interested or invested in the reading material of their society as a means of negotiating those boundaries so as not to become a satiric target themselves.

³⁴ In the Appendix to the 1998 edition of the novel, Duncan Isles suggests that the Countess originally appeared in the novel as a character who could direct Arabella towards more virtuous books, like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, whose plotlines featured heavily in the first draft of the novel (426).

be apply'd to those few and natural Incidents which compose the History of a Woman of Honour. And when I tell you [...] that I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper Education, receiv'd the Addresses of my Lord --- through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him with their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in great Harmony together, I have told you all the material Passages of my Life, which upon Enquiry you will find differ very little from those of other Women of the same Rank, who have a moderate Share of Sense, Prudence, and Virtue. (327)

The Countess narrates the primary events in a woman's life that attach her to social institutions: christening to religion, education to contemporary social mores, and marriage to the authority of her husband. No woman stands out for public reading, yet the extreme domesticity that this narrative implies conflicts with the expansive societal landscape that Arabella has previously had access to. Lidia De Michelis argues that the Countess's representation of the self "issues an unequivocal statement concerning women's allotted place in mid-eighteenth-century society" (193); indeed, that place is decidedly void of anything resembling the plot of Lennox's novel. Without Arabella's mistaken notion of reading subjectivity, *The Female Quixote* itself does not exist. When social literacy and public acceptance become substitutes for personal and social identity, women like the Countess write themselves straight out of the novel and the public sphere.

The Countess defends her position by reflecting on the developing notions about women's bodies, the value of those bodies, and virtue. She notes the change in women's subjectivity since the romances, namely that women's positions as objects then meant greater power than the position means now:

A Lady in the heroick Age you speak of, would not be thought to possess any great Share of Merit, if she had not been many times carried away by one or other of her insolent Lovers: Whereas a Beauty in this could not pass thro' the Hands of several different Ravishers, without bringing an Imputation on her Chastity. (328)

A woman's being surrounded by men who have access to her body used to be a sign that she held power over them, but women who give many men access to her body in Arabella's era grant those men power over her, the Countess argues. Ultimately, women who exist only as objects do not have the power to control the reception of their character, regardless of their potential for a good story. Again, the Countess makes the earlier lessons in the novel clear, but her sudden exit from it leaves Arabella uncured, although uneasy (330).

The Countess's argument raises some significant questions for *The Female Quixote* itself. As the genre of the novel was developing, critics wondered if the form could accurately represent modern subjectivity. If *The Female Quixote* cannot model subjectivity for its readers, what novel could? In the Countess's view, all good women are automatically taken out of consideration for representation in the novel, thereby suggesting that the solution to Arabella's problem with social literacy does not automatically help her problem with subjectivity. She does not offer any answers for women's authorship, suggesting that the gap between women as a writing subject and women as a textual object is almost too difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.³⁵ She fails to answer fully any of the key questions of the novel: How can one teach a reader to understand key distinctions between things that happen in novels and things that happen in the real world? How can a novel represent reality without having people read it *as* reality? Although Arabella (and perhaps many readers) sees the Countess's "secret Charm [... and] the Force of her reasoning" (329) as a potential panacea, her characterization points to the profound uncertainty and complexity surrounding Lennox's examination of literacy, discipline, and subjectivity.³⁶

³⁵ The Countess is a bad model for women's writing for another reason – she shuts down any possible debate. The narrator says that through the "Deference always pay'd to her Opinion, [she] silenc'd every pretty Impertinent around her" (322).

³⁶ The Countess' position in the novel still vexes me, perhaps because she appears as a character with potential to cure Arabella within the female community, negating the humiliation Arabella

After Arabella jumps in a river because she would rather die than be ravished by her perceived attackers, she receives a visit from the authoritative Doctor, a character modeled after Samuel Johnson. Arabella attempts to argue that her actions were justified, but the Doctor suggests otherwise:

Has it ever been known, that a Lady of your Rank was attack'd with such Intentions, in a Place so publick, without any Preparations made by the Violator for Defence or Escape? Can it be imagin'd that any Man would so rashly expose himself to Infamy by Failure, and to the Gibbet by Success? Does there in the Records of the World appear a single instance of such hopeless Villainy? (372)

The Doctor asks Arabella if any historical precedent exists for her perceptions, and she responds with a question of her own: how does he know that any of the places *he* reads about actually exist? Some readers may overlook Arabella's small victory in what is otherwise a very one-sided conversation: she and the Doctor agree that books help readers gain knowledge about lives they have not lived and places they have not visited. Essentially, both the Doctor and Arabella agree that literacy, particularly in its relationship to reality and fiction, is an ideologically fraught activity. However, the novel has been insistent on pointing out how reality is imbued with fiction; for example, Hervey invents an excuse to court Arabella, but that fiction is underscored by his real desire for her fortune. Additionally, Sir George invents a romantic fiction to win Arabella, but his playacting results in Glanville running a very real sword through him. A careful reader of Lennox's novel has learned not to trust fully the content of her texts nor the world around her, so the Doctor's insistence on the existence of one particular reality should prove suspect.

later suffers from the Doctor. Particularly to the modern reader, it seems perplexing that she should come so close to changing Arabella, only to vanish into the pages of an untold story. Perhaps she serves as a reminder that the problems of women's subjectivity cannot be solved in the ways that women wish them to be.

Moreover, the socially literate reader has observed that members of society are motivated by economic wealth and power, so the Doctor's arguments should be read in this context as well.³⁷ As he converses with Arabella, he denounces her beloved reading material:

Then let me again observe [...] that these Books soften the Heart to Love, and harden it to Murder. That they teach Woman to exact Vengeance, and Men to execute it; teach Women to expect not only Worship, but the dreadful Worship of human Sacrifices. Every Page of these Volumes is filled with such extravagance of Praise, and expressions of Obedience as one human Being ought not to hear from another; or with Accounts of Battles, in which thousands are slaughtered for no other Purpose than to gain a Smile from the haughty Beauty, who sits a calm Spectatress of the Ruin and Desolation, Bloodshed and Misery, incited by herself. (380-381)

The Doctor damns the romance genre, claiming that it teaches readers improper power relationships, particularly women's power over men. Through his reasoning, Arabella comes to understand how mistaken she was in her belief of her absolute power, but the socially literate reader does not have the same awakening. Rather, the reader's position allows her to see that the Doctor's argument is a production of his powerful space in society and his own particular interests in keeping that power. His scorn exists not for the romances, or indeed for texts in general, but for how they prompt subjects to actions which invite the disciplinary gaze.³⁸ By representing the Doctor from this perspective, the novel suggests that texts are not necessarily important for their truthful representation of a world, but for the power relationships they incite in a society.

³⁷ Furthermore, the Doctor's understanding of history may be specious, as Jane Spencer argues: "For all their historically-minded insistence on the changing nature of human custom, these men cannot grasp the possibility that customs might ever have been so radically unlike the ones they know as to allow women an important place in history" (337).

³⁸ David Marshall observes that the portion of the *Rambler* which the Doctor cites "is largely devoted to criticizing the behaviour of women" (129), suggesting that Lennox may not be in complete agreement with her noted sage.

Several critics have taken both the Doctor's sentiments and the narrative voice to be suggesting that women themselves are the problem with fiction, and in particular, the novel. Christine Roulston argues that "[w]hat the novel gradually reveals is the fact that the fictional mode is tied less to romance than to the feminine subject position itself" (40), and Laurie Langbauer thinks the *Female Quixote* sends the message that "Arabella's only escape from romance is to stop being a woman" (81). Certainly, the novel's stance towards a woman's standing out in public and directing the reception of her character is not positive, but I think that Arabella's fate is not the only indicator of the novel's position towards women and fiction. For Lennox, the Doctor's interpretation of romances, while authoritative, need not be the final word on their validity and legitimacy as forerunners to the novel. Sharon Smith Palo argues that "Lennox's position on the question of whether romance reading inhibits or perpetuates a woman's intellectual development remains unclear" (214), and while that may be true, it is because Lennox argues for a new way of shaping women's intellectual development: social literacy. Romances may help a reader understand a society, or a mixture of romance and realistic fiction, like *The Female Quixote*, may help women read relationships of power. Texts, then, become what Eric Rothstein calls "a starting point for autonomy" (269), private spaces in which women can practice the reading skills they will need in the public sphere to avoid being a spectacle and perpetuating gendered ideologies.

Lennox is not precisely the feminist writer that modern readers would like her to be, but neither is she wholly complicit in disciplinary structures that objectify women. The social literacy that *The Female Quixote* teaches cannot change society on its own, but its connections to the cultural and societal ideologies of its modern society keep women out of the gaze of men, in hopes of making their "text" less in need of correction. Lennox does not solve the problems of

women's writing and reading in her novel, but perhaps leaves room for her socially literate reader to continue the task of carving out public space and blank pages for female authors.

Chapter Two

Frances Burney's *Evelina* and the Book of the World

Frustrated over her latest public blunder, Evelina Anville writes to her guardian Mr. Villars, “But really, I think there ought to be a book, of the laws and customs à-la-mode, presented to all young people, upon their first introduction into public company” (185). Throughout *Evelina*, the title character is perplexed by the complicated and subtle codes used by the men and women in London society, and her letters to friends and family serve as a safe place in which she can investigate these codes and evaluate her responses to them. These letters also display how some women develop public and private selves, thereby encoding another set of “identity kits” (Gee *Introduction*)³⁹ to be unpacked by readers of the novel. Through Evelina’s adventures, Frances Burney shows how women in public need to learn social literacy, or how to decode the performances of others and anticipate the ways in which they must perform their own individual identities. In a sense, Evelina’s book “of the laws and customs à-la-mode” is replicated in *Evelina* itself, which educates young women on the multifaceted (and potentially hazardous) systems of communication that must be negotiated upon one’s entrance into fashionable society.⁴⁰ However, in this chapter, I will argue that although Burney considers women’s ability to read other people and the world as essential, she also questions the performance of identity without a referent to a “real,” or interior, private self. Burney rejects the perceived tendency of reading culture to produce falsified, artificial selves, and instead uses

³⁹ For more on identity kits, see the Introduction.

⁴⁰ According to David Brewer, “*Evelina* came out in at least twenty-three different editions prior to 1801” (163), and numerous translations of the popular novel were also made. Thus, eighteenth-century readers might have read slightly different versions of the same novel, complicating these already complex systems of communication detailed in the novel.

literacy as a metaphor for appropriate feminine selfhood.⁴¹ Ultimately, Burney's novel concludes that although participating in a reading culture restores sympathy between individuals, the way in which these activities ignore the boundaries of public and private identity proves both liberating and limiting for women writers.

Upon examining Evelina's letters, modern readers might be surprised by the dichotomy between how loquacious Evelina is as a narrator and how silent she is as a participant in conversations.⁴² On numerous occasions, Evelina expresses the agonies of having to keep quiet while her acquaintances step over (and in some cases, obliterate) the boundaries of polite society. Additionally, her prudence prevents her from speaking to her guardians and advisors about crucial information, and as a consequence, her reputation balances on a knife's edge throughout most of the novel. Previous scholars have tied Evelina's silence to Burney's nuanced critique of the culture of sensibility, sympathy, and politeness. For example, Patricia Hamilton argues that Evelina's silence and politeness, presented by Burney as a learned behavior, proves to be ineffectual as a tool of social reform in *Evelina* (417, 428). In addition to believing in sympathy as integral to societal fabric and individual character, late eighteenth-century culture held that

⁴¹ For more on reading culture, see the Introduction. It is important to clarify here that my definition of "reading culture" is distinct from the *action of reading* a culture. As Jon Klancher notes, the audiences of a text are mutually shaped by its participants, both readers and writers (12). When I discuss "reading culture," I mean both the discursive circles that are shaped by the mutual interaction between readers and writers, and the process by which these discursive circles are formed.

⁴² It is worth remembering that, historically, writing has often been considered more disreputable than reading; reading's association with religious education and conventional morality tended to cast it in a more respectable light. Thus, writing has been seen, particularly by underserved and underrepresented populations, as an important locus of protest, as Deborah Brandt's interviewee Ames remarks when reflecting on his literacy acquisition in prison: "I'd write my feelings about [injustice] and throw them away. I knew there was trouble to get into for speaking, so I said, well, I'm not going to speak it. I'll just write it down" (63). Thus, Evelina's act of writing her silences into her letters – and epistolary novels in general – does not presuppose that she does not have a voice.

“polite,” or refined, elegant, and correct use of language spread the values of sympathy and served as a marker of one’s moral character. In her reading of the novel, Christina Davidson notes this tendency within eighteenth-century culture and also underscores Burney’s critique of that culture: “Burney shows that language alone cannot be relied on as a badge of morality” (282).⁴³ Overall, critics interpret *Evelina*’s silence within the context of the unspoken and unwritten codes of sympathy and politeness that, according to Burney, no longer work to bind society together.

Less clear, however, is what Burney’s “book of the laws and customs à-la-mode” has to say about how women can operate safely in public when politeness and sympathy are no longer effective. Drawing upon Kristina Straub’s description of the novel as “a divided text that reveals its own dividedness” (231), Hamilton notes the discrepancy between *Evelina*’s scrupulous conversational strategies and the lack of reform she brings about in the unscrupulous members of her family: “One of the ways *Evelina* is divided is that it endorses a value system it reveals to be largely ineffectual” (433). Similarly, Martha Koehler describes *Evelina* as “expos[ing] blindnesses and contradictions in the moral and ideological patterns that the novel self-consciously, sometimes parodically, upholds” (“Faultless Monsters” 21). As *Cecelia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer* reveal, Burney’s career as a novelist traced the figure of a public woman through the minefield of a society in which multiple unspoken codes of behavior created paradoxical models for acceptable female subjectivity. Julie Park notes, “For Burney there are rarely smooth and beautiful shapes for the public representation [...] of a subjectivity associated

⁴³ Susan C. Greenfield considers *Evelina*’s silences within the context of eighteenth-century debates on language use as a boundary between human and non-human subjects (422-423). She concludes that *Evelina*’s inability to speak aligns her — albeit uncomfortably — with non-human subjects. Although *Evelina* has difficulties speaking in public, I choose to see those problems as reflective of issues with her public identity, not with her humanity.

both with the novel and the feminine, [instead,] there are mainly abject ones” (46). Emily Allen claims that Burney’s first novel “construct[s] female subjectivity by narrating what appears to be the very destruction of the subject” (434). Furthermore, Evelina’s public silences position selfhood “beyond the capabilities of language” and delineate “the inaccessible, and therefore inviolate, recesses of the female self” (434). In my analysis of how *Evelina* investigates the boundaries of women’s language and literacy, as well as public representations of selfhood, I consider these two veins of scholarship as interconnected; in Burney’s day as in ours, language, literacy practices, and subjectivity mutually shape each other. In fact, as the final portion of this chapter will conclude, Burney’s first novel explains ideal selfhood in terms of literacy practices; the public self functions as a metaphor, signifying but not revealing the private self.

Burney begins to argue for literacy’s impact on selfhood in the preface to the novel, which connects the reading experience of her novel to the lived experiences of her readers. She explains that her purpose is “[t]o draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times” (95).⁴⁴ Furthermore, she cautions her reader that she should not expect to be “transported to the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, where Reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the *Marvelous*, rejects all aid from sober Probability” (96). Burney’s stance against fanciful and imaginative literature and, simultaneously, against reading in a fanciful and imaginative manner, positions her novel in opposition to *The Female Quixote* and other texts that embrace, however reservedly, disorderly and unconventional methods of reading. Similarly, Evelina, a character of “Nature in her simplest attire” (96) implies a representation of virtuous, pure womanhood, free

⁴⁴ All quotations from the text are from the second edition of *Evelina* (October 1778). Although Burney requested that the title of the novel be expanded to *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, this change was not made until the third edition in 1779.

from the complications of messy and chaotic selfhood developing from “unnatural” experiences. Although Burney’s preface and initial portrayal of Evelina reject disorder, the similarity between the reading experience of *Evelina* and Evelina herself suggests that Burney, like several of her fellow eighteenth-century authors, presents reading as intimately tied to the formation and representation of identity.

Whereas the late eighteenth century perhaps saw sensibility and sympathy as innate aspects of female identity (Hamilton 421), some critics of the novel argue that *Evelina* actually exposes identity as constructed. As L. Lynette Eckersley notes:

Burney routinely reminds us that those qualities which identify a woman as a “true” woman – innocence, simplicity, passivity, and dependency – are constructs that must be acquired through rigorous social conditioning and are not predicated on natural difference. (195)

Certainly, Burney’s novel reveals the inherent slipperiness of identity; the proliferation of doubles and foils (not to mention Evelina’s uncertain social status) points to an author who recognizes the multiple ways in which people define and disguise themselves. Moreover, Koehler argues that the complicated psychology of the self in *Evelina* “obstructs the text’s transmission of didactic messages and self-evaluating mechanisms to the reader” (*Models* 18), claiming that Burney’s presentation of the perfect Evelina does not necessarily result in complete acceptance of her model of selfhood. I think these scholars accurately capture the complexity of late eighteenth-century thought on identity, and thus, the preface’s insistence on natural character and natural reading should not be interpreted in opposition to multifaceted or even constructed identity.

Instead, the preface vigorously attacks the novel, the supposed source of unnatural character:

Perhaps were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation: but since the distemper they have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned. (96)

Although this passage is partly tongue-in-cheek, Burney's preface directs its ire at young women who resist "advice or reprehension" and "the mental art of physic" in favor of reading novels. Thus, women who have constructed identities are not necessarily trouble for Burney's society; rather, her problematic woman has a particular type of literacy identity, or conception of the self in relationship to text.⁴⁵ These women expect *Evelina* to be a novel which will carry them "to the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination," and where, presumably, they can avoid the good advice and lessons of others. Although the disruptive figure of the female Quixote never appears in *Evelina*, the preface is haunted by the figure of a woman who has succumbed to the gateway drug of contemporary novels, and, most controversially, who fails to consult reason and probability in her reading life, and by extension, her real life. By reading *Evelina* in the context of *The Female Quixote*, the mutual practices of reading and forming identity appear as a common ideological battleground for Lennox and Burney.

Moreover, the preface details how the experience of entering the public eye through writing a suitable novel complicates "natural" selfhood and acceptable literacy practices. By reading a text produced and consumed by individuals outside the private sphere, readers inevitably encounter some form of publicity, and even more so Burney herself, who in writing

⁴⁵ For more on literacy identity, see the Introduction.

her novel creates “Frances Burney,” the very public identity of a private woman.⁴⁶ In the preface, Burney observes that “To avoid what is common, without adopting what is unnatural, must limit the ambition of the vulgar herd of authors” (96). Authors should not contribute goods that already exist on the market, she maintains, and “imitation cannot be shunned too sedulously” (96). This emphasis on uniqueness in the reading marketplace leads Park to argue that Burney’s dislike of copying is tied to her discomfort with the automaton, a machine-like person who copies and imitates selfhood (45-46). In Burney’s novel, the automaton is situated uncomfortably close to the figure of the novel reader, whose emotional investment in text puts her at risk of imitating selfhood in novels. When readers become automatons, they lose contact with their “original” or “natural” persona and become unmoored from the interior, privatized self, endlessly replicating and endlessly public. Thus, entering the public sphere is a necessary but ominous task for Burney and Evelina.

In the privacy of Mr. Villars’s country estate, “young, artless, and inexperienced” (96) Evelina lives a presumably productive and happy life despite lacking important documentation which would solidify her place as an acceptable gentlewoman in public society. Villars expresses his satisfaction with Evelina’s private tutoring, writing to Lady Howard that her education, “however short of my wishes, almost exceeds my abilities” (101). However, Villars and Lady Howard agree that “the time draws on for experience and observation to take place of instruction” (107), indicating that Evelina’s schooling should take a new form. Lady Howard describes this education as determining how to accurately perceive the public sphere:

⁴⁶ Of course, *Evelina* was originally published anonymously, but Burney’s voluminous correspondence and journals point to a woman who was very keenly aware of the complications of maintaining a public identity, even before the publication of her hit novel. Her father Charles Burney maintained a wide circle of professional and artistic friends, and young Fanny’s journal served as a confession to “Nobody,” because “Nobody” was the only one with whom she felt totally unreserved (*Journals* 1).

When young people are too rigidly sequestered from [the world], their lively and romantic imaginations paint it to them as a paradise of which they have been beguiled; but when they are shown it properly, and in due time, they see it such as it really is, equally shared by pain and pleasure, hope and disappointment. (106)

Thus, Evelina's entrance into the world is not simply a question of learning new things (the city is not a paradise), but of learning *in new ways* (seeing a thing "such as it really is").⁴⁷ In Lady Howard's vision of education, Evelina will learn how to interpret the world, to read it realistically and reasonably.⁴⁸ This skill is akin to what I have been referring to throughout this study as *social literacy*: reading people as one would read texts. Similar to Lennox, Burney presents social literacy as a set of skills that aid a young woman in her development as a subject capable of representing herself in public.

On the other hand, *Evelina* also documents a profound mistrust of Evelina's literate activities. When Evelina writes to Mr. Villars requesting a trip to London, she says that she feels "bewitched," and her pen follows this imaginative spirit (114). Later in the novel, Villars cautions Evelina against falling in love with Orville, as her mind writes of him with a "glowing pencil, dipt in the vivid colours of her creative ideas" (444).⁴⁹ Evelina's writing is not only described as imaginative, but it is also anthropomorphic, as her pen becomes bewitched and imbued with creativity. Not only does Evelina's pen capture her fanciful state of mind, but it also threatens to shape her judgment in unnatural, almost monstrous, ways. Thus, readers see that "unnatural" selves can occur if Evelina allows her literacy skills to become part of herself, or in

⁴⁷ Melissa Pino notes that "Evelina poses a problem for any theory privileging education in matters of taste and judgment" (290). As my dissertation as a whole suggests, the education of young women – and often specifically literacy education of young women – poses a problem for a number of educational theorists in the eighteenth century.

⁴⁸ Essentially, Villars and Lady Howard try to do what Arabella's father did not: structure an education so as to teach a young woman how not to be a female Quixote.

⁴⁹ For Koehler, the fact that Evelina "creates" Orville in this way undermines both his and her respective statuses as moral paragons, as well as emphasizing the impact of perspective on the construction of such paragons (28).

other words, if Evelina loses her “real” self who is *employing* these literacy skills. While I do not believe that Burney rejects literacy outright, her reservations about its impact on subjectivity are apparent. Certainly, automatons create trouble for Burney and her culture because they imitate selfhood, but Burney also shows how literacy, specifically, opens women up to the possibility of becoming automatons.

Compounding these concerns over literacy, Mr. Villars also expresses anxiety over Evelina’s entrance into public. As he explains to Lady Howard, his original intentions in taking in Evelina were not only to educate her, but “to adopt her as the heiress of my small fortune, and to bestow upon her some worthy man” (235). As Lisa Zunshine notes, Villars’s concerns over Evelina’s property and social aspirations are reflective of “the subjectivity of the author writing for middle-class audiences and understanding too well their financial worries,” rather than aristocratic values (138).⁵⁰ Because the discovery of “some worthy man” probably depends upon Evelina establishing herself to others as a reputable woman, these economic concerns correlate with Evelina’s ability to be sociable. Bourgeois attitudes are also apparent in Villars’s feeling of a “perpetual conflict” (234) between giving a proper education to Evelina in private and helping her become publicly acknowledged.⁵¹ Villars’s apprehension over Evelina’s future suggests a range of beliefs on “proper” womanhood: first, that once women enter the public sphere, their worth relies heavily upon their reputation, and second, that “perpetual conflicts” between

⁵⁰ In her study of illegitimacy in eighteenth-century England, Zunshine argues that “Mr. Villars’s hypertrophied anxiety about Evelina’s legal status reflects only very superficially (or not at all) the challenges faced by a real-life natural daughter of a wealthy nobleman and a rich gentlewoman, or even Evelina’s actual situation” (136).

⁵¹ In fact, Villars believes that his education has ill-prepared Evelina for society: “Alas, my child, the artlessness of your nature, and the simplicity of your education, alike unfit you for the thorny paths of the great and busy world. The supposed obscurity of your birth and situation, makes you liable to a thousand disagreeable adventures” (223). Of course, these “thousand disagreeable adventures” are the stuff of the novel, as Arabella’s adventures are the driving force of her novel.

women's public and private identities should be resolved. Whereas Villars firmly draws lines between Evelina's education in the countryside and her potential for publicity (and thus her unlearning of morality) in London, as the following paragraphs suggest, his clear delineation of public and private identity becomes undone by Evelina's interactions with different types of texts.

After watching famous David Garrick act in *The Suspicious Husband*, Evelina writes a letter to Villars that relates her overenthusiastic reaction to the performance: "I almost wished to have jumped on the stage and joined them. I am afraid you will think me mad, so I won't say any more; yet, I really believe Mr. Garrick would make you mad too if you could see him" (117). Although Garrick's acting has often been read in the context of theatricality and performativity, few scholars have considered how this scene can be read in the context of performance and literacy practices.⁵² When discussing Garrick's noteworthy abilities, Evelina writes, "I could hardly believe he had studied a written part, for every word seemed to be uttered from the impulse of the moment" (116).⁵³ Evelina observes that when Garrick acts, the original text of the play becomes almost completely irrelevant to the people watching the performance. Of course, Evelina knows that at one point, Garrick read the lines that he later speaks on stage, but his

⁵² Theresa Michals observes the similarities between Evelina's artlessness and Garrick's natural acting style: "Garrick's untheatrical theatre is like a domestic space, one presided over with graceful ease by a good woman [Evelina] who makes the performance of a cultural ideal look like Nature itself" ("Like a Spoiled" 194). In making the theater less of a theater, Michals argues, the novel can comment upon the consumption and production of acceptable femininity, which is itself a type of performance. On the other hand, Pino views this scene as a satirical moment by pointing out that Evelina has "committed an obvious error in taste by being transported at the wrong sort of play," because her love of Garrick's comedy suggests her inexperience with more sublime works (275). I tend to side with the readers who view this scene as an attempt to reclaim the stage, for, as I discuss later in the chapter, the dangers of theatricality seem to be located elsewhere.

⁵³ When Burney went to see Garrick on May 30, 1772, she wrote that "he seemed so truly the monster he performed, that I felt myself glow with indignation every time I saw him" (*Journals* 16).

ability to perform the person inscribed in that text transcends what the written word itself can do. In terms of literacy practices, Burney presents Garrick as not only someone who can acquire a new identity from written discourse, but who can embody that written discourse so well that he can be interpreted – by Evelina at least – to be a native inhabitant of that discourse. Garrick’s performance only hints at the “real” self, the one who read the script of the play. Furthermore, Garrick’s acting indicates to Evelina how performance enables language to surpass written and spoken text, as she tells Villars that “every look [of Garrick’s] *speaks!*” (117). Garrick’s performance has not only transcended the written text of the play, but he *becomes* a type of text able to be read by others regardless of whether or not his audience has any knowledge of print literacy. Allen describes Evelina’s experience at the play as almost “transgress[ing] the border between watcher and watched” (438), but Burney also shows how the boundaries between text, performance, and self can become blurred.

I find it interesting that Evelina reacts to this play in a manner that deconstructs, almost negates, the importance of print literacy, which, as seen through her letters, is crucial to her self-development. These values are likely in conflict with novel readers, who enjoy personal pleasure from the experience of reading the novel and joining a reading culture. However, I do not think that Burney rejects literacy outright; rather, as in the preface, she makes an argument against certain types of literacy identity. By not limiting his performance to the script on the page, and more importantly, by adopting an identity that is not marked by his literacy prowess (or lack thereof), Garrick presents a different version of what it means to be a reader. Whereas the silly novel readers in the preface restrict themselves to being the type of people they read about in texts, Garrick pushes the boundaries of identity by incorporating more into his character’s life

than was in the original text. Although literacy is presumably an important part of learning how to become a new kind of person, Garrick transcends the text that he reads.

In contrast, another reader in the novel, Mrs. Selwyn, suggests that both women and men *should* incorporate elements of reading culture into their social identity. In Bristol, Mrs. Selwyn jabs at Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, who are harassing Evelina, stating that they could not possibly understand how Evelina passes her time, “for the young Lady *reads*” (406). “[Y]ou are got into bad hands,” notes Mr. Coverley, suggesting that young women who read are too prudent to go out with the young men, as they have been requesting Evelina to do. By incorporating reading into Evelina’s social identity, Mrs. Selwyn establishes Evelina’s respectability, indicating that young ladies “are *no where*” (405) and should not enter the public sphere too often. Similarly, Mrs. Selwyn uses literacy to calculate Coverley’s and Merton’s worth when she proposes that their bet should be over who can recite the longest ode of Horace (423). Lovel objects, noting that “one has not much time, even at the university, for mere reading” (424), and he is unable to name any ode of Horace’s, or indeed, any classical works at all. Mrs. Selwyn’s facetious remarks reveal the lack of depth in Lovel’s education, and presumably the inadequacy of Coverley’s and Merton’s, as neither of those gentlemen takes her up on the offer to recite odes. More importantly, her indication that the men are “afraid of a weak *woman*” (423) to enter this competition points to how men value their literacy as an identity marker of their superiority over women. The ideological value of reading and its relationship to identity lie underneath Mrs. Selwyn’s humorous asides.

Similarly, Evelina asks the men to measure their worth by participating in another literate and learned activity, composing a couplet on the spot. Coverley claims that he has an edge in this competition, but again, neither man takes her up on the offer to display their literary prowess.

However, unlike Evelina and Mrs. Selwyn, Lord Orville rejects literacy as a measure of a person's worth, as he proposes that the gentlemen should settle their bet by determining who has the most worthy person to share the money with. Rather than suggesting that one's investment in reading culture should determine one's identity, Orville points to humanity, benevolence, and kindness as worthier values to incorporate into social identity.⁵⁴ His status as the voice of virtue in the novel indicates the limits of reading culture's impact on selfhood, both for men and for women, as Evelina "experienced something like shame, [...] struck and affected by a rebuke so noble [...] that I felt my eyes filled with tears" (425-426). Through Evelina's shame, Burney not only teaches her main character and her readers that reading culture is a less important marker of social identity than other, more genteel, values, but she also indicates the importance of social literacy; like Mrs. Selwyn, Evelina has been reading people based on the wrong set of values.

Thus, I suggest that good literacy skills are more valuable to Burney than good books, as throughout the novel, Burney describes scenes where books fail Evelina or when books go unread.⁵⁵ For example, Evelina requests a "book of the laws and customs à-la-mode" that does not exist (185). Also, at her first ball, Evelina refuses to dance with Mr. Lovel and then accepts the attentions of Lord Orville. When confronted by Lovel, Evelina vaguely remembers "something [she] had heard of the rules of an assembly," which turns out to be a very clear code of behavior: "the impropriety of refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another" (126). Evelina's immediate recognition of her mistake points less to her not knowing the rules of the assembly (after all, she quickly identifies where she has gone wrong) and more towards her not

⁵⁴ This is not to say that Orville is not a good reader. He reads a satirical poem with Evelina rather than playing cards with his sister and her friends, and he marks the passages "most worthy to be noticed," a sign of a good discerning reader (430). As will be discussed later in the chapter, he is also skilled at reading other people.

⁵⁵ I thank Catherine Parisian for helping me frame this idea and contributing additional examples.

having the script of the rules memorized. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, readers of the novel never see Garrick read the script that inspires his performance in *The Suspicious Husband*. The most despondent character in the novel, Macartney, is often seen reading, and after Evelina talks him out of committing suicide, he drops a book when he looks at her (338). Immediately before Lord Orville proposes to Evelina, Mrs. Selwyn asks her to look for some books, which Evelina cannot find. Orville tells her that “you are dearer to me than language has the power of telling!” (492). In her letter reporting the proposal to Mr. Villars, Evelina writes that she “cannot write the scene that followed” (492). Mrs. Selwyn enters the room, finds the books immediately and distributes one to each of the group, but the books are left unread. The motif of unread or nonexistent books underscores a far more serious question invoked by *Evelina*: Can books, or even the didactic novel, actually teach young women how to behave? Even when Evelina has the script of proper behavior, as in the above example with Willoughby, the script fails her. In other instances, following what the script of good behavior tells her to do – as when she attends the opera with Madame Duval like custom dictates – results in drawing negative attention to herself. For Burney, text is unreliable as the sole means of education. As Lady Howard indicated at the beginning of the novel, Evelina’s education (and by extension the education of the reader) has to come by learning in new ways: from situations instead of books.

One such situation is the scene at Cox’s museum, which serves as a microcosm of selfhood in public, as the museum’s show of jeweled mechanical objects reflects eighteenth-century conversations on public spectacle, femininity, and taste. As Park notes, the machines on display serve as “the very distillation of what the fashionable world fosters, [...] showcases for fashionable people who participate in life not as themselves, but, much like dolls and automata,

as signs and referents of something else” (36-37).⁵⁶ Evelina is nonplussed by the exhibition, describing it as “astonishing, and very superb; yet, it afforded me but little pleasure, for it is a mere show, though a wonderful one” (176).⁵⁷ Evelina’s ambivalent response to the spectacle of the mechanical pineapple resembles Burney’s ambivalence to the spectacle of the public woman, figured in her novel and in contemporary discourse as the site of conflicting models of public femininity and readable bodies.⁵⁸ Like the mechanical pineapple and other oddities at Cox’s Museum, people who occupy the space of a spectacle draw the attention of readers of the world. Evelina becomes a spectacle several times in the book, perhaps most noticeably when she is featured in Macartney’s poem and becomes the talk of Bristol (466). Additionally, each disastrous episode with Madame Duval places Evelina at the center of the public’s attention, much to her chagrin. Even the traditional Villars recalls a time when he considered making Lady Belmont (and by association, Evelina) into a spectacle:

There was a time indeed, when, to assert the innocence of Lady Belmont, and to blazon to the world the *wrongs*, not *guilt*, by which she suffered, I proposed, nay attempted, a similar plan: but then, all assistance and encouragement was denied. (236)

However, the novel as a whole repudiates the idea of women occupying the space of the spectacle, as women who consistently draw the attention of others, particularly men, are portrayed as unfeminine, perhaps even inhuman as in the case of Madame Duval. Evelina’s

⁵⁶ Pino argues that “Burney satirizes, in general, man’s corruption of nature for his own worldly designs. In particular, she ridicules the tendency to fetishize and objectify female fertility: here is a pineapple that will never lose its fecundity, as long as there is an expert to run diagnostics on its moving parts” (298). For both Pino and Park, the mechanical pineapple serves as a metaphor for mechanical women (for Park and I, specifically the automaton figure), yet few critics have noticed the importance of the pineapple to public identity.

⁵⁷ Her measured reaction to Cox’s Museum stands in stark contrast to her enjoyment of Garrick’s play. Whereas the play showed how Evelina discounted the text of the performance, Evelina’s initial guarded reaction to the show of fashionable mechanisms suggests that she at least somewhat recognizes what the kinds of work that went into the presentation of the pineapple.

⁵⁸ For more on the figure of the spectacle, see the Introduction.

measured delight of the mechanical pineapple suggests Burney's reservations towards developing a public identity.

As mentioned above, Madame Duval illustrates how intrinsic social literacy is to avoiding the position of the spectacle. Her public display, often in various stages of undress, marks her as incapable of understanding how she is read by others. She frequently oversteps the boundaries of polite society by saying things in public that should be said in private (according to *Evelina*, at least), and she fails to read how much others despise her. Of course, this is not to say that she is an unsympathetic character; Captain Mirvan in particular bullies and provokes her constantly. Yet Burney suggests that in revealing everything to both members of her circle and complete strangers, Madame Duval opens herself up to multiple, often negative, interpretations. Like the mechanical pineapple, Madame Duval may be "astonishing," but her consistent failures at policing herself certainly "afforded [*Evelina*] but little pleasure." Interestingly, this excessive display of selfhood becomes associated with illiteracy and non-readers.⁵⁹ For example, Lady Howard, reporting on a letter she received from Madame Duval, calls her "still as vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to marry her; nor does she at all apologise for addressing herself to me" (100). Even though Madame Duval presumably wrote a letter, thereby suggesting that she has some sort of literacy skills, Lady Howard links her lack of decorum to a failure of reading and writing. In Lady Howard's eyes, Madame Duval cannot truly be a reader or writer of text if she does not have the social literacy skills to read other people. Burney presents a society in which women who cannot read other people risk occupying

⁵⁹ Tellingly, once *Evelina* has met Lord Orville, the "object of ideal perfection," she describes the inhabitants of London – a collective of public individuals – as "illiterate and under-bred" (288).

the position of a spectacle; moreover, she portrays how social literacy is integral to the identity of a literate person.

Even though the women in *Evelina* who occupy the space of the spectacle risk their reputation, the novel also shows the necessity of becoming something like a spectacle: a readable, legible body. In Jürgen Habermas's conception of the eighteenth-century development of the public sphere, representations of people in text were crucial to the spread of bourgeois forms of selfhood. For Habermas, the relationship between reading culture and modern bourgeois selfhood was mutually beneficial: "The relations between author, work, and public changed. They became intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was 'human,' in self-knowledge, and in empathy" (50). In Habermas's configuration of social identity, modern selfhood formed and was formed by texts that included private selves represented as public selves, as the individuals in the texts afforded readers a glimpse into their private lives, which became more and more public as these forms of selfhood were circulated in reading culture. Moreover, a public self represented in a novel, or in Allen's terms, "the readable body of bourgeois individualism" (438), becomes a readable "text" for individuals to decode. Read in the context of Habermas and eighteenth-century conceptions of reading and selfhood, the pineapple scene, along with the consideration of spectacle in *Evelina*, invokes a new use of literacy: that of a metaphor – instead of a marker – for identity. As mechanical pineapples and unreadable women like Madame Duval do not have the benefit of being accepted by society as an autonomous subject, they serve as ideal vessels for exploring the differences between a reading subject and a non-reading non-subject. In other words, in addition to teaching women how to be *readers*, Burney uses literacy and reading to explain how to be *subjects*. Throughout the novel, Burney has criticized certain aspects of literacy and reading

culture: women who imitate selfhood from books are threats, books and scripts fail Evelina, print literacy is a less important marker for identity than kindness, and reading people is a more important skill than reading texts. However, Burney encourages literacy and reading as ways to *talk about* selfhood.

Although I have been discussing Evelina's growth in terms of what she learns and internalizes, the male authorities in the novel, Villars and Orville, often urge her to speak her mind. When she goes to stay with Madame Duval, Villars asks her to "learn not only to *judge* but to *act* for yourself" (279). Upon finding Evelina acting on her own and meeting secretly with Macartney, Orville later echoes this advice: "surely Miss Anville must best judge for herself!" (434). Like Evelina herself, these men encourage Evelina to act upon her own agency; more precisely, they ask her to become the type of person others can clearly interpret. As Orville provides stalwart support of Evelina's judgment, she feels it necessary to explain her wholesome connection with Macartney, and Villars instructs her to maintain her good reputation in the public eye and differentiate herself from Madame Duval's crude behavior. As Evelina has learned from the examples of women how to read other people, the two virtuous men in the novel encourage her to act so as to be read by others.

Lord Orville in particular reads not only her behavior but her body as a text: "if I may be my own interpreter, Miss Anville's countenance pronounces my pardon" (439). As Helen Thompson notes, Evelina's silences in conversation, along with the discussion of her countenance and blushes, suggests that her language is dependent on the public reception of her body (150). For Thompson, *Evelina* outlines the problem of – not necessarily the solution to – becoming a public woman:

Burney [...] represents public sociality as a peculiarly mediated practice, confusing the distinctness of the coordinates that animate Habermas's history. Far

from affirming the smooth displacement of one form of public selfhood by another, Burney's novel claims their vexed proximity as its heroine's defining dilemma. (149)

Certainly, becoming a public woman is a problem for both Burney and Evelina because entering the public sphere involves placing the female body, often figured in contemporary discourse as the core of private identity, in the position of a spectacle. However, it should also be noted that the process of becoming a readable body affords Evelina some privileges, as well. After all, Evelina's body is not *completely* on display, as opposed to, say, Fanny Hill in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748).⁶⁰ Even as she resists publicity, Evelina manages to catch a rich, titled man by using the language of her blushes, saves her long-lost brother by being "a spectacle so astonishing [...and] too beautiful to be human!" (356), and reunite with her father through her resemblance to her mother. Like Garrick, Evelina is rewarded every time a look of hers *speaks*.

Similarly, when he examines the mechanical pineapple at Cox's museum, Lord Orville argues for the utility of public spectacle. Notably, his criticism of the spectacles echo criticisms made about reading culture:

I am sorry it is turned to no better account; but its purport is so frivolous, so very remote from all aim at instruction or utility, that the sight of so fine a shew, only leaves a regret on the mind, that so much work, and so much ingenuity, should not be better bestowed. (216)

Although the spectacles are, as Evelina noted, "fine" and "ingenious," Orville questions their function. His comment is similar to Foucault's notions of the utility of the spectacle: the spectacle serves as instruction for all to read on social norms. Orville himself serves as the disciplinary force in the novel, as he scolds his company in addition to politely steering the conversation in other directions; yet he also represents a member of the public who gazes upon

⁶⁰ However, Evelina does get mistaken for a prostitute at one point in the novel.

women and reads their identity. Evelina associates him with both literate activities and the disciplinary gaze when she writes to Villars, “If I find that the *eyes* of Lord Orville agree with his *pen*, - I shall then think, that of all mankind, the only virtuous individual resides at Berry Hill” (409).⁶¹ For Orville, the spectacle needs to instruct others on some sort of virtuous principle and instill discipline in all who read it, as he does through his public identity. Thus, reading and literacy are not necessarily aspects of one’s public identity; instead they form the groundwork for talking about identity.

Indeed, equating people with books allows the other disciplinary force in the novel, Mr. Villars, to reestablish familial and sympathetic ties. When Villars, whom Allen calls the text’s “Super-Reader” (443), sees Evelina upset, he refers to her as a book, “a book that both afflicts and perplexes me!” (394). He asks her if “we [can] read it together” (394) to help determine what weighs upon Evelina’s heart. Evelina is hesitant to confess her latest public dilemma (starting a correspondence with Lord Orville), and asks him if she can fetch another text, “or will you have this again?” (395). Villars employs the metaphor of Evelina as a text, and the act of reading Evelina eventually helps her reconcile the two parts of herself. Villars’s simple solution – to return the letter to Orville as a way of mildly (and silently) admonishing him – leads Evelina to vow to confide in him more. Whereas I agree with the scholars who see Evelina’s silences as a criticism of a world that no longer honors sympathy, this scene is the only one where people

⁶¹ It is worth explaining the context of this quotation in detail. Evelina has received a letter from someone purporting to be Lord Orville, and in this letter, he confesses his love for her and alludes to Evelina starting a correspondence with him, a clear breach of protocol on her part. Evelina, worried about seeing Orville again, expresses anxiety that he will reveal himself to be the same sort of person he appears to be in his letter. This scene is another example of texts failing Evelina, as the letter is not Orville’s at all.

reading other people *produces* sympathy between them, albeit within the domestic circle.⁶²

Villars's intrusion into Evelina's thoughts reflects the mobility and authority of masculine identity, but using text as a metaphor for Evelina herself gives her the space to reconcile the different versions of herself: the private individual with Villars and the public individual who has a problem with a respectable man. Ultimately, Burney shows how reading, unlike politeness and other social conventions, restores sympathy in a smaller reading culture that allows individuals to move fluidly between public and private identity.⁶³

In contrast, reading others who have distinct boundaries between their public and private identities produces uneasy sympathy. When Captain Mirvan falsifies a letter stating that Monsieur Du Bois has been arrested, Lady Howard appears to play along with the joke, reading the letter to Madame Duval as if the scenario is real. In her letter, Evelina goes out of her way to explain Lady Howard's seemingly conspiratorial behavior:

I believe that Lady Howard, from the beginning of the transaction, suspected some contrivance of the Captain, and this letter, I am sure, must confirm her suspicion: however, though she is not at all pleased with his frolick, yet she would not hazard the consequence of discovering his designs: her looks, her manner, and her character, made me draw this conclusion from her apparent perplexity; for not a word did she say, that implied any doubt of the authenticity of the letter. Indeed there seems to be a sort of tacit agreement between her and the Captain, that she should not appear to be acquainted with his schemes; by which means she at once avoids quarrels, and supports her dignity. (253)

Given the unmistakable cruelty that Captain Mirvan engages in with Madame Duval, Evelina's reading of the situation appears to be more than favorable to Lady Howard. Faced with Lady Howard's seeming perplexed expression and "her looks, her manner, and her character," Evelina

⁶² Of course, the letter is not actually Orville's; in a sense, both Evelina and Mr. Villars have misread him. My emphasis is on the shared reading of Evelina as a text.

⁶³ Another sympathetic figure, Evelina's long-lost brother Macartney, writes poetry and is seen coming out of a bookshop (337), further indicating the uneasy, but intriguing, relationship between sympathy and literacy.

concludes that Lady Howard is acting rightly, even though she “could not help smiling” (253) when hearing what Madame Duval plans to do in order to free Du Bois. Straub posits that Lady Howard “must cultivate ignorance of her son-in-law’s plots,” thereby drawing out the indignities of female powerlessness in a masculine ideological system (233). However, Evelina’s overly sympathetic reading of Lady Howard’s behavior fails to reconcile the differences between Lady Howard’s public and private identities.

Ultimately, the model of self that Burney proposes in *Evelina* is a metaphorical self: a multifaceted construction of public and private identities that allow the individual to move fluidly between different facets of the self. Just like metaphors, individuals are encoded and decoded by members of a discourse community, and thus require a kind of literacy I have identified as social literacy, or the ability to read people as texts. Moreover, metaphors must retain their signified, just as Burney’s selves must retain some aspect of their interior self. The “bad readers” in the preface, automatons, and the “illiterate” women in the novel, spectacles, are figured as perversions of this metaphorical self; “bad readers” adopt wholly public identities of people in texts as their own, and “illiterate” women display their intimate, private selves to the unforgiving public. In *Evelina*, Burney’s first novel, the tendency of readers to incorporate literacy into their respective identities poses a threat to polite society because literacy identity can be mistaken for true self-worth. On the other hand, Burney also acknowledges literacy’s potential to empower her readers to perform different identities. Readers like Garrick and Evelina can employ their discerning minds on texts and perform the identities in them, all while maintaining their “real” self. Through Evelina’s letters and experiences with reading, literacy, and reading culture, Burney’s *Evelina* traces how eighteenth-century English culture comes to

view literacy as essential to not only functioning within public society, but as fundamental for subjectivity itself.

Chapter Three

Useful Literacy: Identity Borderlands and Character Development in *Belinda*

In “Letters of Julia and Caroline,” part of the larger collection *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), Maria Edgeworth explores the cultural and individual value of sympathy through Julia, a young woman who expends her feeling and sensibility on romances and poetry instead of reality, and her friend Caroline, who is far more prudent. Caroline chastises the types of books Julia has been reading as well as excess sympathy, the waste product that these books produce:

The species of reading you speak of must be hurtful [...] to the mind, as it indulges all the luxury of woe in sympathy with fictitious distress, without requiring the exertion which reality demands: besides, universal experience proves to us that habit, so far from increasing sensibility, absolutely destroys it, by familiarizing it with objects of compassion. (46)

Caroline raises several arguments that demonstrate firm reservations towards “feminine” reading of fiction: reading indulges women’s pleasures without cultivating rationality, reading is a luxurious and therefore elitist act unsuitable for mainstream bourgeois culture, and reading produces lazy sensibilities that undercut the respectable, virtuous femininity demanded by reality. Moreover, Edgeworth’s Caroline accuses reading, specifically the habitual exposure to objects of sympathy through reading novels, of contributing to the *absolute destruction* of sensibility, a rather damning charge.

Similarly, in *Practical Education* (1798), Edgeworth and her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth caution their fellow educators to pay careful attention to the reading material of young women:

Women, from their situation and duties in society, are called upon rather for the daily exercise of quiet domestic virtues, than for those splendid acts of generosity, or those exaggerated expressions of tenderness, which are the characteristics of heroines in romance. [...] Women, who have been much addicted to common

novel-reading, are always acting in imitation of some Jemima, or Alemeria, who never existed, and they perpetually mistake plain William and Thomas for “*My Beverly!*” (“On Sympathy and Sensibility”)

Later in the treatise, the two Edgeworths comment matter-of-factly, “We know, from common experience, the effects which are produced upon the female mind by immoderate novel reading” (“Books”). These examples show that the figure of the Female Quixote disturbs the otherwise rational educational philosophy espoused by the Edgeworth father and daughter.⁶⁴ Maria Edgeworth was a stalwart defender of women’s ability to reason, and her attacks on novel-reading probably stem from a desire to expose young women to a diverse range of texts; as she explains in *Practical Education*, “preceptors should consider, that what we call literary taste, cannot be formed without *a variety of knowledge*” (“Books,” emphasis mine). However, as Edgeworth promotes sensible and rational femininity in *Letters for Literary Ladies* and *Practical Education*, her educational project in *Belinda* (1801) reveals the fault lines in her domestic project, the need to prepare women for the “daily exercise of quiet domestic virtues.”

Curiously, *Belinda* contains several instances of education failing to adequately reform an individual or having little impact on the way individuals live their lives. Mr. Percival’s tutelage is not enough to overcome Mr. Vincent’s tempestuous upbringing in Jamaica, and the education of Rachel Hartley/Virginia St. Pierre goes horribly awry and nearly results in the dissolution of

⁶⁴ In an 1812 edition of the *Edinburgh Review*, the critic Francis Jeffrey took a break from his usual sharp criticism of writers and praised Edgeworth for the mixture of instruction and delight in her novels: “The writings of Miss Edgeworth exhibit so singular an union of sober sense and inexhaustible invention . . . so just an estimate both of the real source of enjoyment, and of the illusions by which they are so often obstructed, that it cannot be thought wonderful that we should separate her from the ordinary manufacturers of novels, and speak of her Tales as works of more serious importance than much of the true history and solemn philosophy that comes daily under our inspection. . . . she has combined more solid instruction with more universal entertainment, and given more practical lessons of wisdom, with less tediousness and less pretension, than any other writer with whom we are acquainted” (qtd. in Myers 194).

the novel's marriage plot. Moreover, Belinda, the main character, does not seem to have learned very much by the end of the novel; at least, her reform is certainly not on the level of wayward women like Arabella and Evelina. In Edgeworth scholarship, these criticisms of education have been tied to her thoughts on the socialization of young women. Teresa Michals notes that Edgeworth's educational writings focus on the problem of "learning how to please an audience by appearing oblivious to its existence," or "the art of appearing artless," suggesting that part of the goal of education is to appear as if one has *not* received an education ("Like a Spoiled" 204-205). Catherine Toal sees Edgeworth's portrayal of education in *Belinda* as revealing the influence of gender ideology on women's subjectivity, arguing that "in making 'fiction' of *Practical Education*, *Belinda* obliquely casts an unrealistic, far-fetched aura over the solid domestic, civic, and economic interdependencies that it takes for granted, and exposes the ideological mechanisms safeguarding these" (222).

One of the ideological mechanisms of particular concern to Edgeworth and other female authors was late eighteenth-century culture's construction of the public and private identities of women.⁶⁵ In her study of eighteenth-century actresses, Felicity Nussbaum notes that viewing women in terms of the performance of identity muddles the public/private split, suggesting that privacy, "rather than being valued principally because of its separation from the public sphere, paradoxically increased its value as a result of its exposure in the public realm" (13). Drawing upon the ways that supposedly "natural" categories of gender are performed, Deborah Weiss argues that Edgeworth's *Belinda* explores female subjects who, "through the disciplined cultivation of the understanding, [...] can become female philosophers," a role that demands

⁶⁵In recent works, scholars conceptualize this divide in terms of Jürgen Habermas's ideas about the development of the public and private spheres among and within bourgeois English society. For a full explanation of Habermas's theory, see the Introduction.

public and private performances of rationality (461). Similarly, Richard De Ritter examines a role that encompasses the public/private split: that of a reader. He concludes that Edgeworth portrays “reading as an act of symbolic labour that enables women to cultivate a Lockean sense of property in the self” (327). Heather MacFayden also argues that Edgeworth considers literacy as compatible with eighteenth-century notions of femininity, as “Edgeworth implies that a woman’s literary skill can coincide with domestic propriety” (439). In this chapter, I will argue that useful literacy does not only enhance Edgeworth’s ideal femininity, but it also helps women connect their separate public and private identities, thereby reconfiguring their concept of the public and private from a binary identity construct into identity borderlands. Through her secondary characters in particular, Edgeworth explores a broad scope of interactions between private and public aspects of an individual’s life.

From the beginning of the novel, Edgeworth engages the intersection between a young woman’s sociability and her literacy skills:

Mrs. Stanhope did not find Belinda such a docile pupil as her other nieces, for she had been educated chiefly in the country; she had early been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures; she was fond of reading, and disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity. Her character, however, was yet to be developed by circumstances. (7)⁶⁶

Like Burney and Lennox, Mrs. Stanhope believes Belinda’s education in the country only partially prepares her for life in society.⁶⁷ Much to the social-climbing Mrs. Stanhope’s chagrin, Belinda is a model of discretion and decency, and she already recognizes the value of domestic life and privacy. Her investment in that sphere suggests that she has internalized domestic

⁶⁶ All quotations from the text are from the second edition of *Belinda* (1802).

⁶⁷ Ever the schemer, Mrs. Stanhope summarizes how education can prepare a young woman for life in society: “[N]o pains have been spared in your education, and (which is the essential point) I have taken care that this should be known – so that you have *the name* of being perfectly accomplished” (9).

notions of feminine identity – an attribute that comes in handy as she passes through several different types of homes as the novel progresses. Indeed, throughout the novel, Belinda displays a familiarity with different types of reading material, such as poetry, essays, plays, letters, even novels, all while maintaining her sound judgment. Whereas Lennox and Burney expressed anxiety over women readers becoming unmoored from their interiorized, private self as a result of reading, Edgeworth's Belinda seems to have passed this test already. Although reading, and particularly novel reading, is later criticized through the figure of Virginia St. Pierre, Edgeworth presents a heroine whose fondness for reading coexists with her other virtues.

In fact, other characters tease Belinda about seeming too reasonable and unfeeling, characteristics that distinguish her from literary stereotypes of female characters. Dr. X playfully remarks that Belinda's levelheaded reaction to Lady Delacour's secret illness makes her less likely to become a Female Quixote:⁶⁸

my dear miss Portman, you will put a stop to a number of charming stories by this prudence of yours – a romance called the Mysterious Boudoir, of nine volumes at least, might be written on this subject, if you would only condescend to act like almost all other heroines, that is to say, without common sense. (132-133)

Belinda's literacy shortcomings, unlike those of Arabella and Evelina, do not form the driving force of the novel named after her. Presumably, her reading material has not resulted in fanciful notions of what the world is like, misguided assumptions about literacy identities, or (as shown through her firm rejections of Lady Delacour's follies and Mr. Vincent's deceit) even a tendency to passively accept immoral or unethical behavior. Essentially, through Belinda, Edgeworth

⁶⁸ Interestingly, he tells Clarence Hervey that he would make "a mighty pretty hero in a novel," suggesting that he is the most emotional person in the room (133).

attempts to prove that the novel can be carried out by adventures of women who are already capable readers of texts.⁶⁹

Instead, Mrs. Stanhope (and perhaps Edgeworth's narrator) points to Belinda's character as her potential for growth. Given that Belinda has been described as a socially acceptable, if not ideal, domestic woman of eighteenth-century Britain, readers might wonder what aspects of her character Belinda should develop. As previous critics of *Belinda* have noted, "character" is a particularly complicated term for Edgeworth. Susan Bolet Egenolf argues that Edgeworth considers two main aspects of character: the struggle to faithfully represent women's lives in fiction (literary character) and the struggle to exist as a woman in public while being faithful to the private individual (moral character) (325). Michals ties Edgeworth's definition of "character" to the late 18th century credit market, both in terms of personal credit that threatened and supported traditional landholding families and in terms of the credit a young woman could be to the moral character of her family ("Commerce"). Finally, Deidre Lynch suggests that to refer to the "character" of an 18th-century British subject is to explore new ways of socializing and categorizing social boundaries in a growing and adapting commercial society (4-5). All of these definitions trace the movement of subjects between the public and private spheres and the way those subjects define themselves in connection to their society, the growing consumer market, and the texts they encounter. In this view, reading culture can be seen as a kind of identity marketplace where texts and reading communities participate in exchanges of ideas about

⁶⁹ Readers have often debated the centrality of Belinda to the novel which bears her name. Edgeworth, writing to her sister Harriet, "Pray give her ladyship a better character than she deserves, and do not despise Belinda even if you should meet with her in a circulating library" (qtd. in Kirkpatrick xi). While my analysis draws heavily upon the actions of secondary characters, I think that Belinda serves as the axis of the novel's spectrum of subjectivity.

identity.⁷⁰ Overall, “character,” which can signify private and/or public qualities of a subject, is eighteenth-century shorthand for talking about individuals’ negotiation of different public, private, and social identities between and amongst multiple discursive communities. Thus, although readers do not get a clear sense of how Belinda should develop her character, both Mrs. Stanhope the socialite and Edgeworth the author might agree that it is important for women to be able to manage their public and private identities in a society where exchange (both mercenary and social) dominates the cultural landscape.

At the beginning of the novel, Belinda joins Lady Delacour in London and experiences her first taste of fashion and public society. However, her previously established fondness for reading changes slightly in this new world: “[h]er taste for literature declined in proportion to her intercourse with the fashionable world, as she did not in this society, perceive the least use in the knowledge that she had acquired” (10). Unlike Arabella, Belinda sees *no* relevance in what she reads. Toni Wein argues that “Belinda’s willingness to jettison her ‘taste’ for reading makes us question how she acquired such a taste in the first place,” suggesting that Edgeworth uses Belinda’s reading to criticize innate morality (304). I suggest that, instead of denouncing the acquisition of her reading habit, Edgeworth criticizes Belinda’s *application* of her literacy. Given the economic implications of developing one’s character, the narrator’s observation that Belinda did not “perceive the least *use*” (emphasis mine) of her previous reading material suggests that part of Belinda’s character development should involve a utilitarian education: finding effective uses for her reading capital.⁷¹ In other words, when faced with perplexing modern economic and

⁷⁰ For more on reading culture, see the Introduction.

⁷¹ The narrator goes on to describe Belinda’s behavior as obedient and unreflective, certainly one reason she falls under morally dissipated Lady Delacour’s spell early in the novel. Additionally, her obedience to Lady Delacour results in Belinda getting into debt temporarily, another signal that economic status and moral character are intertwined.

social situations, Belinda withdraws her reading “goods” from the identity marketplace, decreasing the “supply” in that economy.

In contrast, Lady Delacour refers to literary works often and uses them to sustain her position as the center of public attention. MacFayden notes that “Lady Delacour out-quotes them all, alluding to literary texts eight times more frequently” than the other characters in the novel (425). She hosts a reading party for the amusement of her acquaintances, and several other gatherings feature poetry and dramatic readings, as well as discussions of literary taste. Yet it is less clear how she defines herself in relationship to these texts – that is, defines her literacy identity – perhaps because she ascribes certain beliefs about reading to Belinda instead of espousing her own. For example, when telling Belinda the story of her past, Lady Delacour tells her, “you will be woefully disappointed, if in my story you expect any thing like a novel” (35-36). This statement creates a rather dizzying array of layers: in the middle of a novel, Lady Delacour describes her tale as different from those in a novel, but yet she expects that Belinda *wants* her story to be like a novel, when in fact readers have been given no reason to assume that Belinda expects the world to be like a novel.⁷² MacFayden argues that before her reformation Lady Delacour “uses texts to provide her with a series of nondomestic identities” (426), but I think that Lady Delacour uses texts to *divert* others from her “true,” domestic identity, rather than establishing any sort of understandable identity. By ascribing beliefs about reading to others, particularly Belinda, Lady Delacour makes her own literacy identity more mysterious and unreadable, and thus drives up demand amongst her friends, who want to know more about her. Essentially, Lady Delacour has done what Belinda could not: find a *use* for her reading. In this

⁷² In my multiple readings of the novel, I never found an instance where Belinda draws parallels between her life and novels.

case, Lady Delacour uses reading to create uncertainty about her literacy identity, and perhaps by extension, her social and private identities.

However, just because Lady Delacour has found a use for her reading skills does not necessarily mean that Edgeworth supports this use. In another scene, Belinda worries about Lady Delacour's debt, but Lady Delacour interrupts her: "You are thinking that you are like Camilla, and I like Mrs Mitten – novel reading [...] for young ladies is the most dangerous" (72), and then she is abruptly cut off by the entrance of Clarence Hervey. Belinda never mentions Burney's *Camilla* herself; instead Lady Delacour invents a rationale for Belinda and attacks the "most dangerous" practice of confusing real life with text. Again, Lady Delacour's reference to novels tells readers little about her own relationship to text, only that she (perhaps facetiously) thinks young women should not read novels. However, she fails to notice the other dangerous threat entering her parlor at that very moment: Clarence Hervey, whose sexually charged friendship casts doubt upon her reputation. While Lady Delacour establishes herself as someone who is above confusing the real world for the world of the text, she overlooks a real threat to her domestic happiness. If Lady Delacour has learned how to use her literacy for the purposes of enhancing her public value, it is at the expense of her domestic identity.

Lady Delacour invests in literacy to augment her performance of her social identity; ultimately, she does what Belinda cannot and applies her reading to public, fashionable life. However, as Michals explains, Lady Delacour has the wrong ideas about how the economy of identity works:

Lady Delacour's unforgivable mistake is to assume that status can do the work of character. That is, she misunderstands the meaning of her own signature by imagining that it has value in representing who she is - or rather, who she has been - rather than in representing a real commitment to future action. ("Commerce" 18)

For Michals, Lady Delacour is a problem because she assumes that her representation – her social identity – has value, but without a “real” identity (for Edgeworth, a domestic identity), Lady Delacour does not have any “real” value. I think Michals is correct, yet I also think that Edgeworth presents a solution to Lady Delacour’s and Belinda’s problems with character.

Whereas Belinda views literacy as useful only in the private sphere, unsuitable for the fashionable life of London, Lady Delacour views literacy as useful only for her public identity, and does not see the connections between what she reads and her private life. Earlier, I defined “character” as individuals’ negotiation of different public, private, and social identities between and amongst multiple discursive communities; both Belinda *and* Lady Delacour have character problems because they do not use literacy to help them manage the separate spheres of their lives. By presenting these individuals as mirror images of one another, Edgeworth argues for literacy as a bridge of sorts for women to use as a means of managing different aspects of themselves.

For Edgeworth, women’s management of their public and private selves is particularly important, as she presents a society that, unlike the societies of Burney and Lennox, does not place as much of an emphasis on social literacy, or the act of reading people as one would read texts. At the masquerade, Lady Delacour and Belinda switch costumes, confusing Clarence Hervey and the other guests, who expected Lady Delacour to be the tragic Muse and Belinda to be the comic. Not only are the masquerade-goers unable to tell the difference between the costumed Lady Delacour and Belinda, they also drop their own masks not long after the event begins: “the conversation ceased to be supported in masquerade character; muses and harlequins, gipsies and Cleopatras, began to talk of their private affairs, and of the news and scandal of the day” (23). Even as this society talks about private and public topics, they represent themselves in

their “real” state. While some critics focus on Belinda’s “chameleon-like facility for adaptation” (Wein 306) at the masquerade, the reaction of the crowd at the party is also worth noticing. Instead of testing their social literacy skills by deducing who is behind each mask, this society removes one level of performance.⁷³

Additionally, society’s potential to misread individuals is shown through Clarence Hervey, who, like Lady Delacour, is described as an accomplished reader and writer.⁷⁴ Hervey “had considerable literary talents, by which he was distinguished at Oxford”; moreover, he writes a treatise titled “Upon the Propriety and Necessity of Female Dueling,” recites poetry, and reads aloud with feeling (14, 54, 61, 351). However, he cannot tell the difference between Lady Delacour and Belinda at the masquerade, accidentally calling Belinda a “composition of art and affectation” to her face (26). Instead of looking past the “text” of Belinda, who has been “as well advertised, as Packwood’s razor strops” (25), to discover who she really is, Hervey reads only the surface. Hervey has only experienced the “advertisements” for Belinda – a text of sorts – and like Lady Delacour, he places too much value in representations of identities. Whether she is dressed in her costume of the tragic Muse or in her “Belinda” costume, Hervey has difficulty determining who Belinda actually is and Lady Delacour ascribes beliefs to Belinda instead of asking her what her opinion is. Both of the self-proclaimed accomplished readers in the novel place too much value on the “text” of a person, suggesting that Edgeworth respects quality of reading over quantity.

⁷³Of course, we should remember that their conversations are also performances of a sort, but my emphasis is on dropping one level of the performance: the performance of masquerade characters.

⁷⁴ However, in a misreading that is nearly fatal, Hervey bets that he can swim based upon “some recollection of an essay of Dr. Franklin’s on swimming,” instead of learning how to swim based on experience (91).

Because these characters overvalue the performance of identity, Hervey and Lady Delacour are portrayed as subjects without a clearly interior self, or at least without commerce between two or more identities. Hervey is described as a “chameleon character,” and he “could be all things to all men – and to all women” (14). Although, as mentioned above, he has “considerable literary talents,” when he enters “the company of the idle and ignorant, he pretended to disdain every species of knowledge” (14). Similarly, Lady Delacour adapts her performance to present a particular picture of herself to the public:

Abroad, and at home, lady Delacour was two different persons. Abroad she appeared all life, spirit, and good humour – at home, listless, fretful and melancholy; she seemed like a spoiled actress off the stage, over stimulated by applause, and exhausted by the exertions of supporting a fictitious character. (10-11)

Katherine Montwieler argues that Lady Delacour’s successful performances throughout the novel and her successful performance of domestic womanhood at the end of the novel means that Edgeworth believes “any woman can effectively perform ideal femininity” (350). While this is true, Edgeworth’s concern seems to be with women whose performances of femininity are distinct from the “spoiled actress.” The passage above describes not only the emotional toll of Lady Delacour’s performance, but it also marks the *physical* toll that her performances take on her body: listlessness, melancholy, overstimulation, and exhaustion.⁷⁵ Here, Edgeworth suggests that a split between social and private identities is not limited to problems of performativity and theatricality, but of embodiment as well.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Performances affect Hervey’s body as well, perhaps most notably in the swimming incident, when Hervey nearly drowns because he decides to show off to his friends. Yet perhaps because of his gender, Hervey’s body is not portrayed in the same fashion as Lady Delacour’s; his body does not become a metaphor for his moral condition.

⁷⁶ Nussbaum notes that actual actresses in the eighteenth century did not have difficulty maintaining the private and public aspects of their identity: “actresses with loyal fans in tow participated significantly in this shifting of public/private boundaries [...] most celebrated

The physical manifestation of Lady Delacour's subjectivity problem is also evident in her injury to the breast, "a hideous spectacle" (32). As Lady Delacour explains to Belinda, she engaged in a duel with Mrs. Luttridge – significantly, both women are dressed in men's clothing, thereby performing an identity that has little or no connection to their private identities – and her pistol backfired, wounding Lady Delacour's breast. On one hand, Michals argues that this injury is a sign that Lady Delacour's theatricality threatens her domestic potential, suggesting that her breast, a symbol of domesticity, has been damaged by her performance of non-feminine identities. ("Commerce" 207).⁷⁷ On the other hand, Montweiler emphasizes Lady Delacour's misinterpretation of her injury, claiming that the novel suggests that she was never naturally corrupt to begin with (356-357). However, I think these two lines of argument can be reconciled by seeing Lady Delacour's body as the locus of her split between her social and private identities. For Michals's part, Lady Delacour's performances are actually harming her body, as I suggested above. Lady Delacour becomes a person who is not connected to the private Lady Delacour, and this incident results in what she thinks is a fatal wound. As long as Lady Delacour continues to injure herself by separating her social and private identities, she cannot be "cured."⁷⁸ For Montweiler's part, Lady Delacour's private self is perfectly acceptable – the problem lies in its failed connection to her social identity. Thus, as Lady Delacour learns how to reconcile her

actresses [...] had the opportunity to carve out a coherent personhood while projecting an accessible, layered interiority that traversed the boundaries between dramatic character and private self, between public display and personal revelation" (16).

⁷⁷ MacFayden supports this interpretation: "Lady Delacour's diseased breast, for example, metonymically represents her diseased mind and her refusal to accept that legitimate femininity is defined by its domesticity and its ability to regulate a domestic circle" (425).

⁷⁸ Lady Delacour seems to have some knowledge of the separation between her social and private identities, as when she tells this story to Belinda, she interjects, "O that I had, at this instance, dared to *be myself!*" (48). In this instance at least, Lady Delacour appears to be aware of her false belief in the power of representation, yet she does not change her behavior until much later in the novel.

public self to her domestic life (by letting Lord Delacour in on the secrets of her boudoir and her friendship with Hervey), she finds that her breast was hardly injured at all.⁷⁹ As mentioned in the previous two chapters, eighteenth-century culture comes to view the body as the seat of both the individual, private identity and the social identity, able to be read by the public. Overall, Edgeworth explores the disconnect between these two aspects of the individual through Lady Delacour's injury.

If Belinda cannot be recognized in public for who she is, Lady Delacour's injury is an even blanker slate for her society to try and interpret: it can be taken to represent the locus of Lady Delacour's problems with subjectivity, her dissipated connections to paragons of bad morality like Harriet Freke and Mrs. Luttridge, her lack of femininity in dueling, her excessive femininity in being the wholly artificial woman of pleasure, her unworthiness as a mother (that is, symbolic of her inability to feed or raise her child), her heart being in the wrong place, and as Montweiler notes, her utterly false belief in all of these meanings. In Edgeworth as in Lennox, the spectacle – here, Lady Delacour's breast and body – take on multiple, even seemingly contradictory meanings from the public. For Foucault, the shift from the spectacle to surveillance was also a shift from complete truth (open and understandable to all who viewed the spectacle) to more specific and more subtle truths imparted to individuals (35, 78). Edgeworth explores a different kind of world: the spectacle is a text that has become so saturated with different meanings as to become almost meaningless, as Lady Delacour discovers at the end of the novel when Dr. X quickly cures her. Earlier, I explained how Lady Delacour drove up demand for her literacy identity by ascribing beliefs about reading to Belinda instead of explaining her own.

⁷⁹ Lady Delacour's boudoir serves as a physical representation for her private self, and as Nicole Reynolds argues, is one focus of the novel's discourse about reading: "Lady Delacour's boudoir, while not depicted as a site of female reading, is nevertheless a product of a feminized literary marketplace" (115).

Essentially, Lady Delacour swings wildly between being no one and being everyone, a paradox that destabilizes the identity marketplace. If Edgeworth's society finds it difficult or uninteresting to read other people like texts, Lady Delacour presents an entirely unreadable body.

Belinda expresses concern about her social identity, particularly at the masquerade, where Hervey insults her. Belinda internalizes this criticism, telling herself that "never more will I expose myself to be insulted as a female adventurer. Little did I know in what light I appeared. Little did I know what *gentlemen* thought of my aunt Stanhope – of my cousins – of myself" (28).⁸⁰ Belinda has accomplished what Arabella in *The Female Quixote* could not: respond to public criticism of her character and attempt to use this information to shape her public persona. However, Belinda phrases her plan of action in terms of what she will no longer *expose* to her society, not what she will *present* to that society. Belinda configures her social identity in terms of she will hide from the public, or what she will not allow to be read. This strategy does not amount to the fluid movement between social and private identities that would perhaps solve Lady Delacour's problems. Instead, I suggest that Belinda's reformation, along with the reformation of Lady Delacour and Virginia St. Pierre, highlights the importance of literacy for managing one's private and social identities, as seen through the example of the Percivals and Dr. X.

Mr. Percival is "a man of science and literature," and he also knows how to employ his reading material, for he can draw "[f]rom the merest trifles [...] some scientific fact, some happy literary allusion, or philosophic investigation" (216).⁸¹ Lady Percival shares his tastes in

⁸⁰ Given Edgeworth's portrayal of a true "female adventurer," the ridiculous Harriet Freke, later in the novel, Belinda's chastisement of herself appears disproportionate.

⁸¹ Unlike Lady Delacour and Hervey, Mr. Percival does not invest too much in representations: "I am not in love with lady Delacour's picture of herself, [...] but I was once in love with the original" (95)

literature, making her “the chosen companion of her husband’s understanding, as well as of his heart” (216). Dr. X has a “great literary reputation,” and has apparently written several treatises (111). Not only do these characters possess considerable literary talents and interests, they also argue for the importance of private, domestic identities. Dr. X tells Hervey that he believes “for the interests of literature, that poets may always be lovers, though I cannot say that I desire lovers should always be poets” (108). Essentially, Dr. X suggests that those who write for the public should draw upon their experiences as a private individual. Similarly, Lady Percival advocates for the commerce between social and private identities when she tells Belinda that true companionship spans both the social and domestic worlds:

In the slight and frivolous intercourse, which fashionable belles usually have with those fashionable beaux who call themselves their lovers, it is surprising that they can discover any thing of each other’s real character. Indeed they seldom do; and this probably is the cause why there are so many unsuitable and unhappy marriages. A woman who has an opportunity of seeing her lover in private society, in domestic life, has infinite advantages; for if she has any sense, and he has any sincerity, the real character of both may be developed. (240)

Notably, Lady Percival associates the development of “real character” with the young couple’s mutual investigation into the different aspects of themselves. Overall, Edgeworth’s portrayal of the Percivals and Dr. X suggests that her ideal forms of subjectivity incorporate literacy practices into the commerce between the private and social aspects of individuals.

Thus, Lady Delacour’s reform cannot just come from her reading material; she also has to use those reading materials in a way that connects the disparate identities she performs. When preparing for her operation, she reads *Wesley’s Admonitions* and marks the passages she likes.⁸²

⁸²John Wesley was an advocate for literacy, particularly amongst the poor. He advised his itinerant preachers to make a habit of reading: “Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or, at least, five hours in four-and-twenty. ‘But I read only the Bible.’ If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St.

However, Belinda, upon examining the markings, cannot quite find a pattern for the types of passages that appeal to Lady Delacour:

Some were highly oratorical, but most of them were of a mystical cast, and appeared to Belinda scarcely intelligible. She had reason to be astonished at meeting with such books in the dressing-room of a woman of Lady Delacour's character. (470)

Vicki Tolar Burton notes that for Methodism, “[r]eading and writing were central to individual spiritual development, to communal worship, and to Wesley’s social control of his movement and his followers” (227). While not using these books for communal worship, Lady Delacour’s absorption of Methodist doctrine follows Burton’s first and last categories. Although Edgeworth likely disagrees with Methodist beliefs, she also criticizes the split between public and private, as Lady Delacour hides these books in her dressing-room (even locking them in a bookcase) and does not talk about them with her husband.

Thus, even though Lady Delacour has undertaken a regimen of reading, the books alone fail to reform her, and her maid Marriott notes that her physical symptoms return: “I am sensible [...] that ‘tis those books that have made my lady melancholy all of a sudden” (301). Instead, once Lady Delacour reconciles her domestic and social identities, her physical and emotional condition improves. Edgeworth frames this reformation as the product of Lady Delacour’s appropriate use of her literacy practices.⁸³ For example, she allows Lord Delacour to read letters from Clarence Hervey, and she asks Dr. X to recommend a librarian to her husband so that the

Paul. [...] ‘But I have no taste for reading.’ Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade. ‘But I have no books.’ I will give each of you, as fast as you will read them, books to the value of five pounds” (qtd. in Burton 229).

⁸³ In the original draft of the novel, Lady Delacour died from her cancer (Egenolf 343). This alternative ending of the novel raises some interesting questions: Like Burney, did Edgeworth question the efficacy of literacy and/or the didactic novel as a tool for individual reform? Did Edgeworth think that Lady Delacour’s problems with subjectivity put her beyond hope for a cure?

couple's library, a space that reflects both domestic and social interests, can be reorganized.

(Upon hearing about Lady Delacour's Methodist tendencies, Dr. X sends her a chaplain instead.)

Through Lady Delacour's reform, Edgeworth advocates for literacy as a vehicle for reconciliation between individual and social identities of a subject; this reform thus enables Lady Delacour to maintain certain elements of her personality – as she says, “A tame lady Delacour would be a sorry animal, not worth looking at” (314) – while “curing” her faults.

In contrast, Harriet Freke is a woman whose personal beliefs result in her erratic social behavior, making her one of the few characters in the novel who does not have a secret life. Mrs. Freke exposes her “masculine” understanding to the world and terrorizes those who have publically insulted her. In a humorous conversation with Belinda, Mrs. Freke elevates her own reasoning over the ideas contained in books:

‘You read I see! I did not know you were a reading girl. So did I once! but I never read now. Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for those who can't think for themselves – but when one has made up one's opinions, there is no use in reading.’

‘But to *make* them up,’ replied Belinda, ‘may it not be useful?’

‘Of no use upon earth to minds of a certain class. You, who can think for yourself, should never read.’

‘But I read that I may think for myself.’

‘Only ruin your understanding, trust me. Books are full of trash – nonsense. Conversation is worth all the books in the world.’ (227).

Instead of drawing from wisdom in books, Mrs. Freke uses conversation and her own opinions as a model for her world. As Deborah Weiss argues, Mrs. Freke fails to understand “that reading enriches the intellect and gives it the raw materials upon which to make moral decisions and form good judgments” (446). At the beginning of the novel, Belinda could not discern how she could use what she read in fashionable society; Mrs. Freke fails to see *any* use for reading whatsoever.

However, Freke's view of literacy stimulates Belinda to reflect upon her own character.

By now familiar with the models of Lady Delacour, Clarence Hervey, Mrs. Freke, and the saintly Percivals, Belinda evaluates her values:

Mrs Freke's conversation, though at the time it confounded Belinda, roused her, upon reflexion, to examine by her reason the habits and principles which guided her conduct. She had a general feeling that they were right and necessary; but now, with the assistance of lady Anne and Mr Percival, she established in her own understanding the exact boundaries between right and wrong. (232)

Belinda takes in information from all sorts of "texts," both the good models and the bad, and this information allows her to see the broader spectrum of morality.⁸⁴ I think that it is important to remember that at this point, Belinda's reform is internal: she resists the bad examples that she has been surrounded by, and she reaffirms her faith in her own reasoning. As Belinda's judgment has been established as sound already, her ability to read others and learn lessons from their examples does not produce many changes in her public behavior.

However, Belinda's internal reform is necessary for her outward reform, because without firmness of reason and effective use of her reading material, another reader, Virginia St. Pierre, threatens to become a Female Quixote. Virginia's mother left her boarding school to elope with Virginia's father (Mr. Hartley), who attributes her rash behavior to her literacy identity, commenting that she had been "spoiled by early novel-reading" (408). In contrast, Virginia, originally named Rachel, is not formally educated and is kept apart from society. She does not know how to write, and the few experiences she has had with text have been heavily censored by her grandmother. Although Clarence Hervey, who gives Rachel a name inspired by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie*, encourages her to read and write in a

⁸⁴ Belinda has a similar moment of comprehension earlier in the novel when she hears the story of Lady Delacour's scandalous past: "for the first time in her life she reasoned for herself upon what she saw and felt" (69).

limited fashion, her new guardian Mrs. Ormund argues that girls should never learn to read (368).⁸⁵ In an attempt to counteract women's perceived tendency to believe that the world operates like a novel, the authority figures in Virginia's life limit her experiences with text.

Yet Edgeworth suggests that a woman without reading material, like Harriet Freke, cannot develop the reason and reflection that make a good subject. The narrator says that without any real-life models, "all [Virginia's] notions were drawn from books," and like Arabella in *The Female Quixote*, she is specifically described as reading romances (380-381). Without being exposed to the wide variety of texts, both print texts and people "texts," Virginia fails to cultivate an interior self: "I have only confused ideas, floating in my imagination, from the books I have been reading. I do not distinctly know my own feelings" (381). In addition to limiting the development of her private identity, Virginia's books do not help her manage her social identity, probably because she does not have a society to practice with. For example, Hervey notices that when Virginia rejects luxurious diamonds, her behavior has "more of ignorance and timidity, perhaps, than of sound sense or philosophy" (371). Not only does she reject the diamonds based on ignorance, but she also relies upon others to determine her behavior, as she qualifies her stance with an address to Hervey: "unless you wish it: - if you bid me, I will" (371). Without many real-life social interactions or development of sociability through proper reading, Virginia fails to develop a private, interiorized self and represent that self to others.

In becoming the type of woman Caroline criticizes in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, Virginia inscribes her reading material on the world around her, as Mrs. Ormund believes that these books "contributed to increase her passion for the only man who could, in her imagination,

⁸⁵ Actually, Clarence Hervey might be the best candidate for a Quixote, because he reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works and thinks that he can make that world come into being. Hervey's experience is also Richard Edgeworth's, as Maria Edgeworth's father raised his first son according to ideals in *Émile* "with disastrous results," according to Julia Douthwaite (36).

represent a hero" (380). In a sense, Mrs. Ormond's fears come true as Virginia falls in love with the picture of a man, and his image "haunts [her] day and night," appearing before her when she reads about heroes (468). Although this unusual love affair costs Virginia a certain amount of shame, at the end of the novel, her dreams come true when Lady Delacour presents her with Captain Sutherland, the man in the picture who saved Virginia/Rachel's father. This reward leads Toal to conclude, "The girl's experience fails [...] even really to serve as a "warning" against the hazards of an addiction to novels, since her notions of actuality are no more thwarted than those of the exemplary reader (Belinda)" (221). Certainly, the idea of rewarding one character who invests so heavily in textual representations of "real" people (Virginia) while criticizing or reforming others that do the same thing (Clarence Hervey, Lady Delacour) is perplexing. However, I think that we can understand Captain Sutherland's appearance as more than just a "reward" for Virginia, the Female Quixote. Virginia defines her private self in terms of his presence, as his memory is her only remaining connection to her family and early life. Furthermore, her engagement to Captain Sutherland solidifies her social identity and reputation, as the public no longer suspects that she is Hervey's mistress. Essentially, Captain Sutherland – an image, a text, and a subject all in one – performs the same function for Virginia that literacy performs for the two other main female subjects in the novel, Lady Delacour and Belinda. He brings together two of Virginia's identity constructs (underdeveloped though they may be) and provides a space for Virginia to access these different versions of herself. Thus, Captain Sutherland is more likely Virginia's cure for her subjectivity problems, stemming from her reading habits, than he is her reward.

In my analysis of Captain Sutherland, I purposefully blur the lines between characters and texts because after the establishment of Captain Sutherland's identity, Edgeworth herself has

Lady Delacour acknowledge the fiction of *Belinda*: “And now, my good friends, [...] shall I finish the novel for you?” (477). Lady Delacour considers ending the novel with a letter from Mrs. Stanhope congratulating Belinda, then decides upon an arrangement of the characters “in proper attitudes for stage effect,” and finally concludes with a witty couplet: “Our *tale* contains a *moral*, and no doubt, / You all have wit enough to find it out” (478). This final assembly of literary and theatrical tropes has vexed critics of the novel. Generally, critics fall into two camps: those who see the final scene as compatible with Edgeworth’s notions of domesticity, like Douthwaite, who argues that the staged portions are unironic, although highly artificial, because they mimic sentimental, didactic paintings (47). On the other hand, critics like Egenolf note that through calling attention to the domestic tableaux, and therefore the art of the novel, Lady Delacour undercuts her own reformation (344). Yet if using her literacy to connect her private and social identities has been the means of Lady Delacour’s reform, then using her literacy abilities to arrange a “text” that represents her personal and public happiness is evidence that her reform has been successful. Ultimately, the theatricality at the end of the novel is perhaps less important than the two literacy events that come before and after the staged scene.

However, Belinda’s reform is less theatrical and more subtle, as her engagement to Clarence Hervey reconciles her private feelings and her social reputation as a respectable woman. Hervey reenters Belinda’s life while she reads a poem, “The Dying Negro,” with Mr. Vincent, who “was not perfectly sure of his own critical judgment [of the poem] and his knowledge of English literature was not as extensive as Clarence Hervey’s” (347). For his part, Hervey compares Belinda with Virginia St. Pierre and determines that he wants to marry Belinda, who has “cultivated tastes, an active understanding, a knowledge of literature, the power and the habit of conducting herself” (379). Thus, Edgeworth portrays literary taste as

forming the basis of their mutual attraction and companionship. By rejecting Mr. Vincent, Belinda acknowledges the validity of her interior feelings and recognizes that she cannot sacrifice them for a man who is not only addicted to the dangerous vice of gambling, but who has hidden that side of himself from Belinda and the Percivals. Instead, Belinda can have free commerce between her domestic identity and her social identity by marrying her fellow reader Clarence Hervey.

Overall, the domestic project of *Belinda* is to help women manage their occasionally disparate private and social identities. Even for women like Belinda who are already invested in domestic happiness, entering society demands a new type of identity work, as new models and new texts of selfhood constantly emerge. In response to the complicated social structures of late eighteenth-century culture, Edgeworth portrays literacy as an important vehicle of subjectivity that encompasses an individual's social and private identities. Thus, Edgeworth's reformed women who use literacy to traverse identity borderlands redefine the public/private split of female subjectivity and channel their reading abilities into the development of highly valued characters.

Chapter Four

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, the Illusions of Self, and a Society of Readers

In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's famous panegyric on novels takes up the cause of the female novel reader while also gently poking fun at that same reader. As she mocks anti-novel discourse, Austen laments the writers who inscribe novels into their works only to have the heroine "turn over its insipid pages with disgust" (29).⁸⁶ At the end of her speech, Austen places a popular periodical in her fictional reader's hands instead of a disgraceful novel:

Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste: the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it. (30-31)

Austen's facetious support of the novel interrogates the literacy identity of the stereotypical novel reader as she presents a young woman who, although not interested by the subject matter of the periodical, nonetheless displays it to others as a marker of her sense, taste, and respectability.⁸⁷ In addition to presenting a false façade by professing to enjoy a text she does not, this young woman tells others that she is "no novel-reader," but it is also clear that she is no periodical-reader either, if she cannot recognize the genre's "improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living" (30-31). Thus, Austen's famous diatribe suggests that *neither* the periodical reader nor the novel reader

⁸⁶ All quotations from the text are from the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* (1818, although the bulk of the novel was written from 1798-1799).

⁸⁷ For more on literacy identity, see the Introduction.

are actually good readers; if many novelists have agreed that stereotypical novel readers are not that bright, the same is true of *Spectator* readers, who falsely believe that their favorite periodical represents the real world.

For Austen, reading is inherently a social activity; her imaginary novel reader plays the social game by claiming the *Spectator* as her reading material, and its application to subject material “which no longer concern[s] anyone living” reveals it to be a poor use of reading time. She implores novel writers to develop their own community and leave the novel’s critics to themselves, for “we are an injured body” (30). For scholarly critics of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen’s views on reading are often considered in terms of how she envisions the connection between the traditional domestic novel – a genre that most novel readers today cannot imagine without her – and the Gothic novel, associated with more salacious plots and disorderly readers. For example, George Levine argues that through her heroine Catherine Morland, Austen “impl[ies] an ironic vision of the ideals embodied in [both domestic and Gothic] literature, read from within the conventions of community” (62-63). In employing an ironic vision of novels and novelistic tropes, Austen, Jan Fergus argues, “wants to bring off a *tour de force*, to expose her readers to everything absurd in a convention or genre and then to make the convention ‘work’ all the same” (*Jane Austen* 20). *Northanger Abbey*’s complex system of simultaneous support and mockery of novels, novel readers, and Gothic tropes aligns most critics with Claudia Johnson’s view that Austen “does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways” (34), such as reminding the reader of the terrible power of the modern patriarchy embodied in General Tilney.

When Catherine uses her literacy skills to identify General Tilney as a Gothic tyrant, critics often understand this moment in terms of Catherine’s emerging autonomy. As Robert

Miles notes, “entering into the Gothic’s discourses involves writing in issues of power, issues of ‘subjective’ debate, and not simple irrationality” (129). Among those who see Catherine’s independence as limited, Christopher Miller observes that Catherine’s choices of husband and reading material are situated within cultural norms of taste: “Even more than in *Sense and Sensibility* or *Persuasion*, the heroine’s courtship is mediated by eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse” (239). Similarly, Susan Zlotnick suggests that Catherine’s consumer tastes reflect the modes of power available to her, because “novels in *Northanger Abbey* emerge as enabling fictions that offer women a vision of agency akin to that embedded in the ideology of the marketplace but with a greater likelihood to enable voluntary female action” (280). Other readings of the novel emphasize how literacy enables Catherine to become an autonomous individual, such as James Nelson, who suggests that reading Gothic novels “affords Catherine a way of recognizing important features of her social world, even if through a dark glass, to which standard conceptual practices are insensitive” (195). Ultimately, many readers subscribe to the view that that the novels which, in Austen’s words, produce “extensive and unaffected pleasure,” as well as “genius, wit, and taste,” also produce a well-rounded (albeit sometimes misguided) individual subject (30). However, in this chapter I argue that *Northanger Abbey* dismisses the concept of a true, separate private individual as a fiction no more probable or contemporary than Ann Radcliffe’s haunted Italian castles. Through exposing how novel reading produces the illusion of autonomy, Austen redefines social literacy to include the consideration of multiple perspectives on objects being read, thereby assembling a self that functions as a nexus for various social identities.

By her own account, Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey* in the late 1790s and finished it in 1803, a period Naomi Tadmor states perpetuated the “image of the impressionable and idle

female reader” (165). As seen in previous chapters, eighteenth-century culture circulated a stereotype of easily influenced female readers, who would take their moral stances straight from novels, so writers often borrowed a page from the conduct book and went to pains to directly inform their reader of the proper behavior of a young woman. Yet, as the *Quarterly Review* notes in their 1821 review of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, Austen’s novels use a slightly different tactic:

The moral lessons [...] of this lady’s novels, though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward, but spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story; they are not forced upon the reader, but he is left to collect them (though without any difficulty) for himself. (360)

The *Quarterly* finds that Austen’s morals, unlike those of more didactic novels, involve some effort on the part of the reader. This individual experience of interpreting texts is replicated throughout the novel, where various readers – not only Catherine Morland, but her friends Isabella and John Thorpe and Eleanor and Henry Tilney – read texts, both the “texts” of their surroundings and the texts of Gothic and other popular novels, and come to different conclusions on their role in everyday life. The narrator, for her part, concludes the novel by acknowledging the necessity of a moral, but “leav[ing] it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience” (198). Just as Austen’s readers within *Northanger Abbey* read to draw individual conclusions, so does Austen’s actual reader of the novel discover her own moral, because Austen refuses to dictate what she thinks the novel’s moral would be. Thus, the *Quarterly* and the surface of Austen’s own novel reflect a growing acceptance of some literacy skills that matter to individual understanding and development.

However, these conclusions are not necessarily true of the whole novel, as *Northanger Abbey* pokes fun at individual interpretations of texts and deconstructs the idea of an individual

subject. In the Advertisement to the 1818 edition of the novel, published nearly a year after her death, Austen notes that the 1803 completion of the book means that since then “places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable change” (8). Unlike other prefaces to novels (such as Burney’s), she refrains from judging her contemporary society, and even calls her own writing on the subject “comparatively obsolete” (8). By asking the public to remember that her reading of society is somewhat old-fashioned, Austen challenges the reader to read her own society. That is, Austen claims her interpretation as her own, and leaves the reader to analyze her own community of 1818 and find out what these “considerable change[s]” are. Austen builds social literacy into the process of reading her novel, as she implies that her readers should not only limit their reading to *Northanger Abbey* itself, but should also read the world they live in.

Previously, *The Female Quixote*, *Evelina*, and *Belinda* all implied that their female subject – however misguided – could develop a private, interior self as a result of their natural state, education, reading habits, and ability to learn from their own experience prior to their entrance into society. However, Austen complicates these beliefs with a description of young Catherine’s education before becoming a “heroine”:

She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. [...] Not that Catherine was always stupid – by no means; she learnt the fable of “The Hare and many Friends,” as quickly as any girl in England. (9)

Although Catherine, like other heroines, enjoys reading, her means of accessing both print texts and the “book of the world” identify her as a new type of reader. She is unable to learn from experience and instead relies upon her mother to teach her things, and even then, her case is bleak. Today, most literacy scholars agree that individuals fully acquire discourses through experience, as James Paul Gee notes: “literacy is mastered through acquisition, not learning, that

is, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings, and teaching is not liable to be very successful – it may even initially get in the way” (“Literacy” 542). Austen’s presentation of Catherine as an “unnatural” learner thus poses a problem for her development, but it also demystifies the “natural” core that lies at the heart of the private subject. Catherine’s story points out exactly how difficult it is to learn from experience when one has no experience to draw upon. Readers do not get much information on Catherine’s curriculum, but it is reasonable to suppose that it includes at least some events, people, and skills that are outside of her immediate experience in the domestic sphere. Overall, Austen’s rejection of the model of “natural” selfhood, one capable of learning from experience, suggests that social and public interaction, not just learning within the home, is necessary for a subject to mature.⁸⁸ Catherine’s need for teaching hints at the possibility that private education could fail to produce a subject with a private, interiorized self capable of rationally understanding the world around her.

Similarly, Catherine’s experience with books fails to develop her personal understanding, as she thinks that her texts only apply to her emotional well-being:

But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives. (11)

Catherine reads in order to store the lessons she learns in her memory, a private and individualized space. Additionally, in the Longman edition of the novel, editor Marilyn Gaull notes that Catherine’s quotations often have “little to do with the pathos of the original poems” she reads, so Catherine is isolated from the reading culture that constructs the meanings of these poems and the mutual community of sympathy that springs up around sentimental texts (11 n10). Moreover, Catherine favors “all story and no reflection,” appreciating the quotations that are

⁸⁸ After all, the story that Catherine picks up so easily is aptly named “The Hare and *Many Friends*.”

“serviceable” and “soothing” to her (11). Notably, these texts do not supply Catherine with consistent guidance and inner meaning; instead, they alleviate her mood at one moment in time. For Catherine, literacy produces temporary emotional indulgence and stability; she constructs a type of reader who uses texts to supply comfort, not one who reflects upon what she has read and adjusts her behavior or self-image to account for new reading material. Catherine’s literacy skills result in a thwarted rational reader, because she cannot apply the lessons in books to her experience, and a thwarted emotional reader, because the model of sympathy derived from her reading material does not extend to others in her society.

Thus, part of the joke in Austen’s first sentence – “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine” (8) – is that Catherine, at least initially, is hardly a subject at all, much less a heroine. In describing Catherine’s literacy identity, Austen parodies the literacy skills of “heroines,” suggesting that reading without thinking, reflecting, or empathizing qualifies Catherine for that honor. In this way, Austen rejects what Harvey Graff would later call the “literacy myth,” or the belief that literacy automatically results in greater personal fulfillment and/or socioeconomic status. Instead, Austen frames social interaction as ultimately more beneficial to women’s fulfillment than literate discourse, such as when Catherine “felt more obliged to the two young men for this simple praise than a true-quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms” (18-19). Of course, this is not to say that literacy does not have its place in the development of an Austen heroine, as will be discussed later. But for women like Catherine who read without access to the “book of the world,” the first step to becoming a subject is not to read more about the world, but to actually live in it.

However, Austen does not propose that the modern subject should adopt the values of her society blindly. Instead, Henry Tilney provides a model for reading society through multiple perspectives. In Bath, he teases Catherine that they have been amiss in not conversing about “how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before, whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether” (20). Jan Fergus reduces Henry’s heroic virtue simply to “mak[ing] jokes about literary and social conventions” (*Jane Austen* 14), but this is precisely Austen’s point. Henry’s jokes imply both his understanding of the society he inhabits and, because he can laugh at those conventions, his ability to see that society from another perspective.⁸⁹ Henry’s capacity to mock linguistic and literary conventions, such as small talk in a Bath ballroom, reflects his experience, familiarity, and perhaps even resistance to the modes of discourse in society. Moreover, Henry spoofs himself, suggesting that he can turn the gaze of society upon himself and understand the favorable and unfavorable impressions he might have made on different people. He describes an imaginary entry in Catherine’s journal which would depict himself as a “queer, half-witted man who [...] distressed me by his nonsense” and, alternatively, a “very agreeable young man [...] who] seems a most extraordinary genius – hope I may know more of him” (21). Actually, Henry’s self-portraits are accurate; Catherine listens to his discussion of muslin with Mrs. Allen and fears that he “indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others,” and the narrator states that at the end of the night, Catherine had “a strong inclination to continue the acquaintance” (23). Drawing upon his knowledge of society and his performance in that society, Henry correctly predicts how others will read him and displays his prowess in social literacy.

⁸⁹ In another joke at women’s expense, Henry praises journals for their “easy style of writing,” except for their three main faults: “A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar” (21).

It is less clear how Henry developed his social literacy abilities, although he is described as a prolific reader. He claims to have read “hundreds and hundreds” of novels, including all of Ann Radcliffe’s works, and says that his “hair [was] standing on end the whole time” he read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (86).⁹⁰ Henry mines his reading material for ways to talk about events in “real life”:

Do not imagine that you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas. If we proceed to particulars, and engage in the never-ceasing inquiry of ‘Have you read this?’ and ‘Have you read that?’ I shall soon leave you as far behind me as [...] your friend Emily herself left poor Valancourt when she went with her aunt to Italy. (86-87)

Instead of simply telling Catherine that he has more knowledge of novels than she has, Henry uses Emily (from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) as a metaphor to explain how vast that knowledge is. In this way, Henry uses texts to appropriate a discourse familiar to Catherine and establish their conversation as a mutual production of meaning, even as he brags about his reading talents. Ultimately, Henry uses novels to construct his social identity as a reader and to prompt social commerce between communities of readers.

In Henry’s exchanges with Catherine, Austen employs different sets of linguistic and mental abilities associated with literacy, such as analogy, educated guessing, interpretation, and conversational prowess. In one particular instance, Henry asks Catherine to compare two social institutions, marriage and dancing, and she claims that she “cannot look upon them at all in the same light” (63). Jonathan Lamb argues that through exercises in analogy, Henry tries to teach Catherine the reading skill of “how to employ suppositions and surmises” in an attempt to connect her imaginative abilities to rational inquiry (62). This is true, but Henry also tries to

⁹⁰ Albert Sears argues that Henry’s claim is probably true for the landed gentry of the time, but library records suggest that fashionable men of London read novels, particularly Gothic novels, much less often (106).

teach Catherine how literacy skills can be engaged both in the individual *and* social aspects of everyday life. Whereas Catherine is capable of comparing the weather in Bath to the weather in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the only person that this information matters to is Catherine herself; moreover, any conclusions she draws from this comparison are momentary or impractical at best. On the other hand, Henry's facetious meditation on the similarities of marriage and dancing could stimulate conversation on the gender roles of men and women, the latter of which might take offense at her role being reduced to "furnish[ing] the fan and the lavender water" (63). Though Henry, Austen suggests that an individual's reading material and reading skills are best directed outward, towards others in society, instead of inward, towards what Austen perceives as the myth of a private, interior self.

Another passionate (and misguided) reader like Catherine, Isabella Thorpe possesses similar mental abilities associated with literacy in that she can compare and contrast things with ease:

She could compare the balls of Bath with those of Tunbridge, its fashions with the fashions of London; could rectify the opinions of her new friend in many articles of tasteful attire; could discover a flirtation between any gentleman and lady who only smiled on each other; and point out a quiz through the thickness of a crowd. (26-27)

However, the difference between Isabella and Henry is that while Henry uses his social literacy skills to mock himself and others and create a reading culture, Isabella appears to believe that she can control her own representation by employing an endless supply of new identities in the service of the "real" Isabella. According to Zlotnick, Isabella "understands that in the absence of personal wealth, she needs to advertise herself as an open and affectionate young woman like Catherine rather than a desperate fortune hunter," thereby turning herself into a type of text: an advertisement (284). Isabella's text of herself fails to interact with many print texts, as she

receives many of her literary opinions secondhand, mainly from her friend Miss Andrews, who, not unlike many readers today, has trouble getting through the first volume of *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753).⁹¹ Instead, Isabella mines her reading material of society to mimic a sentimental young woman, telling Catherine that “my attachments are always excessively strong,” a characterization that is proven wrong by the end of the novel (32). Intent on selling herself on the marriage market, Isabella produces a number of different selves to present to the public: fashionable, sentimental, well-read, sisterly, flirtatious, and thrill-seeker. Yet when others observe the contradictions in those selves, such as when she casts aside James Morland for Captain Tilney, Isabella assures them that this is the “real” Isabella: “You know I have a pretty good spirit of my own,” she tells Catherine once her engagement has been broken (172). Isabella does not only fail to consider others’ perspective on herself, but her belief that a new “real” self will help her escape her predicament culminates in her fall from grace. Through Isabella, Austen questions the ability of individuals to wield the power of a true private self in order to control the public’s interpretations of their social identity.

Thus, Austen’s form of selfhood entails considering societal norms and power structures, which individuals must negotiate in order to be a fully developed subject. A strong critic of cultural mores, John Thorpe says that he never reads novels because they “are so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since *Tom Jones*, except *The Monk*; I read that t’other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation” (40).⁹² His choice of novels implies a bias towards male authors and sexually promiscuous male

⁹¹ Austen herself thoroughly enjoyed Samuel Richardson’s novel, and she even wrote a dramatic adaptation.

⁹² Sears compares John’s comment to contemporary bookseller records, and concludes that “his taste in fiction may be a bit unfashionable,” as these two novels had low circulation numbers (110).

characters, in contrast to Henry's involvement with Ann Radcliffe's novels. Like Henry, he employs suppositions, but John employs these suppositions in place of a careful reading of Burney's *Camilla* (1796): "indeed I guessed what sort of stuff it must be before I saw it: as soon as I heard she had married an emigrant, I was sure I should never be able to get through it" (40). John values his own impressions of *Camilla* over those he might gain by investigating the text and asking other readers what they thought of the novel. His refusal to seek other perspectives on his reading material is mirrored in Austen's masterful description of his conversation with Catherine:

He told her of horses which he had bought for a trifle and sold for incredible sums; of racing matches, in which his judgment had infallibly foretold the winner; of shooting parties, in which he had killed more birds (though without having one good shot) than all his companions together; and described to her some famous day's sport, with the fox-hounds, in which his foresight and skill in directing the dogs had repaired the mistakes of the most experienced huntsman, and in which the boldness of his riding, though it had never endangered his own life for a moment, had been constantly leading others into difficulties, which he calmly concluded had broken the necks of many. (54)

It is doubtful that John's hunting companions with broken necks would corroborate his perception of himself as a bold, manly hunter. His literacy identity as an overbearing and aggressive reader foreshadows Austen's presentation of his subjectivity: instead of considering himself from multiple angles, John asserts a social identity that he has fashioned himself.

While John and Isabella Thorpe attempt to forcibly rewrite how other people see them, Eleanor Tilney accepts the subject position that others have prescribed for her. In response to Catherine's distaste for history, Eleanor justifies the role of fiction in historical reading:

I am fond of history—and am very well contented to take the false with the true. In the principal facts they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as anything that does not actually pass under one's own observation; and as for the little embellishments you speak of, they are embellishments, and I like them as such. If a speech be well drawn up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made – and

probably with much greater, if the production of Mr. Hume or Mr. Robertson, than if the genuine words of Caractacus, Agricola, or Alfred the Great. (88)

Eleanor acknowledges the inventions made by historical writers, accepting that these texts are based on events she has not experienced. Instead of imposing her own experience on the texts, she believes the word of others, even as she understands some embellishments exist. These reading practices suggest that Eleanor becomes the type of subject inscribed in the text, “well contented” to submit to authorities. Catherine notes that historical works include “hardly any women at all,” and Eleanor, accordingly, is hardly a woman at all herself, expressing few opinions of her own and relegating her own love story to the final few pages of the novel (88). Yet even though Eleanor has little agency, she does not end up in the same sort of straits as Isabella does, suggesting that being an individual who views herself as the host for the views of society is, at the very least, an inoffensive type of person to be.

Readers often perceive that, in the later Bath scenes and at Northanger Abbey, Catherine becomes more autonomous because she learns to trust her own judgment, but I suggest that Catherine’s agency stems from her growing sense of social literacy. Whereas interactions with John and Isabella Thorpe result in Catherine being “obliged to give up the point and submit,” her understanding of what the Tilneys might think of her starts her on the path to becoming a subject (71). When she sees Eleanor on the street, she is upset that she has been “disappointed of the promised walk,” a perspective that dwells on her own losses, but she is especially upset that she might “be thought ill of by the Tilneys” (71). For a moment, Catherine considers herself from the viewpoint of the Tilneys, and this revelation leads her to do the right thing: apologize to them and smooth over any hard feelings. By adopting the perspective of members of her community, Catherine can reconcile her desires with those of others and thus promote a harmonious society, the true power of the female subject. Diane Hoeveler argues that Austen “sought finally to

suggest that playing at and profiting from the role of innocent victim was as close as many women would ever get to being ‘feminists’” (121), but Catherine’s feminist actions here are not those of a passive victim, but of an active diplomat. Catherine fuses a rupture in her society, the potential anger of the Tilneys, by interpreting the “book of the world” through the eyes of another reader, not just from her own perspective.

At Northanger Abbey, everyday objects tempt Catherine into interpreting them within only one context: her own perspective gained from reading Gothic novels. The strange chest which was “curiously inlaid with some darker wood,” with a lock was “broken perhaps prematurely by some strange violence,” and a “mysterious cypher” on the lid is similar to the uncanny objects in a Gothic novel (129). The surface of the chest lends itself to such a reading of its contents, but once Catherine opens the chest, she finds nothing more extraordinary than a folded bedspread. Readers of the novel often take the everyday nature of these objects to suggest that Austen urges Catherine to read more deeply and to look beyond the surface, or materiality, of items in her world. I think that is a plausible reading, but I would also like to suggest that items, like people and books, can also be “read” and decoded, and thus serve as metaphors for selfhood. When Catherine looks inside the chest, she finds a mundane object at its core; similarly, individuals, underneath all the trappings of identity, can be pretty mundane people or even, as suggested through the examples of John and Isabella Thorpe, rather empty people. Whereas other eighteenth-century authors might have portrayed the *inner* self as the source of an individual’s uniqueness, Austen suggests that the *outer* self – the social identity that others in society see – is actually what makes the subject interesting and therefore valuable.

Thus, in order for Catherine truly to understand the chest, she must seek out other possible interpretations of the chest, not limit herself to her personal interpretive material that she

finds in the Gothic novel. In the next instance, a cabinet beckons Catherine with its locked door and mysterious manuscript inside (actually a washing-bill), but this scene prompts a different reaction from Catherine. After being fooled by the chest, Catherine simply heads down to dinner with Eleanor, allowing herself no time for contemplation. But after uncovering the true nature of the cabinet and the manuscript, Catherine reflects upon her actions: “How could she have so imposed on herself? – Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly!” (136). While she internalizes Henry’s perspective on her behavior, Catherine experiences shame. In line with Foucault’s perspective of the self, Catherine disciplines herself through imagining an authority watching her and judging her actions.⁹³ However, Austen has little use for the development of this type of self, even as it helps Catherine avoid trouble. In accepting Henry’s gaze as the dependable, essential core of her being, Catherine replaces one version of the private, interior self (the “mythical” self that Austen has previously deconstructed) with another. After all, Catherine has come to these conclusions about Gothic objects because she was egged on by Henry on their drive up to Northanger Abbey:

And it was in a great measure his own doing, for had not the cabinet appeared so exactly to agree with his description of her adventures, she should never have felt the smallest curiosity about it. This was the only comfort that occurred. (136)

Henry teases Catherine with the possibility of hidden doors and frightening storms; after enthusiastically listening to him, Catherine feigns indifference and “began earnestly to assure him that her attention had been fixed without the smallest apprehension of really meeting with what he related” (126). Yet when Catherine sees a cabinet that correlates “exactly” with Henry’s description, she yields to his stance and decides that she has, indeed, a Gothic cabinet. Claudia Johnson correctly notes that Catherine’s failure is not “that her imagination is inflamed with

⁹³ For more on Foucault’s version of the self, see the Introduction.

Radcliffean excesses, but rather that she trusts *Henry's* authority as a sensible man" (39), or that Henry's acceptance of the Gothic leads her to trust it as well. Johnson concludes that Catherine's reflection reveals that "Henry [...] does not know everything" (39), but more specifically, it also reveals that Catherine cannot use Henry's judgment as the inner core of her rational self.

Rather, Catherine learns to view herself as the intersection of multiple perspectives, a stance which is shown to be valid when she correctly interprets General Tilney, Henry and Eleanor's father, as a tyrant. Based on the General's ominous countenance and the incomplete stories Henry and Eleanor tell her about their mother's short illness and a ghostly bedroom, Catherine concludes that the General murdered his wife and is now wracked with "the gloomy workings of a mind not wholly dead to every sense of humanity, in its fearful review of past scenes of guilt" (148). Presumably comfortable with reading the "book of the world," Catherine progresses to using her social literacy skills in order to read people as she would read a book.

However, Henry discovers her conclusions and rebukes her:

Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? (157)

Henry's version of rational thought includes the individual's "own understanding," but also contains an expansive list of the systems which comprise the book of the world – education, laws, society, literature, "voluntary spies," transportation, and newspapers. Whereas Catherine's conclusion is later shown to be valid, Henry rejects what he thinks was her method of coming to that conclusion: believing in herself as an authority to interpret his father, rather than acting as a

host for all of these knowledge and discursive systems and employing them in an effort to understand the truth.

However, Henry does not notice that Catherine's Gothic literature should also be included in the reading material of an individual. When the General cruelly exiles Catherine from Northanger Abbey after finding out that she is not the rich heiress he thought she was, Catherine's conclusion is proven valid. After all, the General has shown several signs of being a terrifying person; he is "always a check upon his children's spirits," and he intimidates Eleanor so much that "her eyes were turned to the ground as she mentioned his name" (122, 176). Moreover, General Tilney is "accustomed on every ordinary occasion to give the law in his family, prepared for [...] no opposing desire that should dare to clothe itself in words" (195); in other words, he sees himself as the only "text" in town, as other people do not venture to "clothe [their opinions] in words." By this point particularly well trained in identifying viewpoints that do not allow for opposing "words" or texts, Catherine is the ideal character to spot the problematic subjectivity represented by the General. Nelson observes that "gothic sensibility highlights a feature of the world in which Catherine actually lives – the stark difference in power between the genders, and the consequent precariousness of women's lives – that is set into the shadow by more standard forms of domestic sensibility" (199). While Catherine's attempts to imprint the Gothic world upon the real one fail, a reader's ability to balance this perspective along with the other evidence from the Tilneys' lives succeeds in finding the true threat to society that has been masked by domestic sensibility.

Austen ends her novel by challenging the reader to understand the meaning of *Northanger Abbey*: "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (198).

On the surface, these “morals” appear to dictate a very unwholesome sort of life, full of parental strife and youthful rebellion. Yet the reader also remembers that these two actions led to the marriage between Catherine and Henry and the renewal of society, so “parental tyranny” and “filial disobedience” might very well be profitable morals for the reader. In this conflicting array of values, Austen reminds her reader that meaning itself is multifaceted and contradictory, and her novel suggests that the Gothic is one of many perspectives that can read a multitude of meanings and produce truths. Thus, a good reader uses her literacy skills to seek out and understand new ways of understanding the world, new social identities that individuals use to portray themselves to that world, and, therefore, new ways of understanding herself.⁹⁴ For Austen, *subjectivity* is a particularly tricky term, as the subject cannot perceive herself as a true, private individual: that is the true fiction that novels espouse. Instead, subjects are inherently social and experiential, and they can draw upon novels as a training ground for reading and interpreting the world, as novels capture, as much as it is possible for any text to capture, the numerous ways of seeing, knowing, and reading that people must use to make their way in society. Richard Lansdown explains that “[t]he brilliance [*Northanger Abbey*] undoubtedly

⁹⁴ In her other novels, Austen’s heroines tend to be readers, but they often become truly happy after seeing themselves through the eyes of another. Although Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* fancies herself the ultimate judge of her own character, she comes to understand the harmful repercussions of her prejudice after seeing how her proud actions may have hurt Darcy during his first proposal. When she adopts Darcy’s perspective and Darcy adopts her perspective, they are able to mend their respective faults and marry. Emma Woodhouse in *Emma* believes that her frivolous pursuits are justified for her own amusement, but after seeing how foolish she appears in Mr. Knightley’s eyes, concludes that she does not honor her station in life with her machinations of power. Like many Austen heroines, her change in character results in a marriage. While Catherine’s version of this plot does not follow the others exactly, *Northanger Abbey* follows basically the same premise: understanding how others perceive her allows the heroine to understand herself more completely. Catherine’s knowledge is limited until she enters society, which provides her with the viewpoints she would not be able to comprehend otherwise. In turn, Catherine, like Elizabeth and Emma, upholds the community by participating in it herself.

possesses has a good deal to do with its ‘multifaceted’ quality, allowing it not only to ‘be read and interpreted in various ways,’ but itself to read and interpret the human activity it records” (63). Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* contains what is perhaps the most multifaceted (some might say dizzying) presentation of the social aspects of literacy.

Whereas Charlotte Lennox’s 1752 novel presented “good” literacy as the difference between a female Quixote and a suitable domestic woman, Jane Austen’s 1818 novel no longer believes that literacy has that type of power. Reading ultimately proves to be too dangerous, too limiting, and too introspective to be wholly embraced by major women authors of mid- to late-eighteenth-century England. Nonetheless, reading appears as a site of essential and fruitful identity-work: for Lennox, a means of shaping social identities; for Burney, a way of describing selfhood; for Edgeworth, a tool for negotiating conflicting identities; and for Austen, a goldmine for new perspectives. In each case, changing views on reading and literacy reflect the ways in which eighteenth-century culture develops and refines the concept of social identity. In Austen, social identity reaches its apex in that *all* identities are shown to be social, shaped, cultivated, and fostered by the individual’s interactions in society. Instead of supporting the universality of the individual subject, Austen advocates for the universality of a social network of readers, who stabilize society through continuous and persistent readings of the book of the world.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Social Identity in the Reading Classroom

“Are there any vampires in *Northanger Abbey*?” asked one of my students when I stopped to talk with her group about an in-class assignment. “I am feeling an Edward vibe from this Tilney guy,” she added thoughtfully. That semester, I applied my ongoing research to the first-year composition classroom and developed a course on nineteenth-century vampire literature and *Twilight*, the popular young adult series written by Stephenie Meyer.⁹⁵ Edward is one of the major characters in the series, a youthful vampire who falls passionately in love with everyday teenager Bella Swan, and the student felt that Jane Austen’s character Henry Tilney had a similar romantic hero “vibe.” While not every teacher in my department would be happy about a student’s attempt to read vampires into an Austen novel, I was thrilled. This student’s observation was one of many that enabled all of my students to access, analyze, and criticize *Northanger Abbey* and other challenging texts.⁹⁶ In this chapter, I reflect upon my experience with these students as a means of arguing that more instructors should encourage students’ methods of reading which incorporate social identity and other social practices.

In suggesting that social identity and social practices should be incorporated into the reading classroom, I am thinking specifically of three ways of reading and thinking about reading that relate to my analysis of eighteenth-century British culture. First, a number of eighteenth-century subjects thought of themselves as an amalgamation of their various private

⁹⁵ See Appendix A for the syllabus.

⁹⁶ We eventually decided that General Tilney was a type of vampire, a patriarchal authority figure who preyed upon others’ emotional and mental health. Although *Northanger Abbey* may not be everyone’s first choice for a vampire literature class, I chose it as a means of helping students understand that the vampire figure resonates on cultural and metaphorical levels in literature.

and social identities; therefore, I feel that instructors should accept students' readings that derive from such subject positions, rather than (perhaps unconsciously) expecting their students to situate themselves as the same kind of subject when approaching a text. In order to show their students that they accept many different ways of defining the self, reading instructors may want to show their students how to read fictional characters in terms of social identity and social practices, as I have done in this project. For students who are well versed at social identity, these methods of reading might help those students see themselves as valued academic readers and writers. Finally, instructors should follow Lennox's, Burney's, Edgeworth's, and Austen's lead and consider reading as a social practice, thereby creating the opportunity for more diverse discussions and assignments that draw upon students' previous ways of reading and writing while challenging them to develop new skills. These are only three suggestions for how to incorporate social identity into the reading classroom, and for me, they are intimately intertwined with one another, as my interaction with my *Twilight* students showed me.

None of my students had ever read *Northanger Abbey* before. One was a self-proclaimed "Austenite" but had not picked up this particular novel, and others had some knowledge of what they perceived to be Austen's sedate, courtly, and Colin-Firth-infested world through movie adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. Overall, the students had very little knowledge of what it was like to live in late-eighteenth century England, as our class was punctuated by questions about why the Allens went to Bath, why Catherine's solitary travel was potentially dangerous, and what was up with all of those carriages. These trends also applied to our other readings for the semester: Lord Byron's poem *The Giaour*, John Polidori's short story "The Vampyre," Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's novella *Carmilla*, and Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. No student had read any of these works; although most had some knowledge of *Dracula* as a foundational text of

vampire literature, their understanding of the book was more influenced by movie adaptations and secondhand accounts than anything else. What they *did* have, however, was an extensive individual and collective knowledge of the *Twilight* series. If I or another student had a question about particular details of the plotline or characters, someone in the class could provide very specific information as an answer – sometimes, with a chapter or even page number reference off the top of that person’s head. In a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester, 38 out of 42 students said that they would classify themselves as a fan of the series, although many qualified this statement by making a distinction between themselves and “superfans” of the series (known in *Twilight* circles as “Twihards”) or adding that they did not like certain aspects of the series even as they enjoyed the overall effect. While students had more context to understand their reading of *Twilight* than they did *Northanger Abbey* or any of the other texts we read, they had an important tool in their reading toolkit: a social identity as a reader of the *Twilight* series.

When asked what their goals were for this course at the beginning of the semester, seventeen students reported that they wanted to be a better reader, often phrasing their objectives in terms of reading “more deeply.” Like many students across the nation, these particular students tended to trust that a gap exists between high school and college expectations for reading, a gap that is mirrored by another perceived binary between reading for pleasure and academic reading.⁹⁷ Despite reports that today’s students read more literature than previous generations (National Endowment for the Arts 1), popular opinion still seems to cast young adults as unintelligent, degenerate readers who wouldn’t know a good book if it hit them in the face. The *Twilight* series is a particular lightning rod for this perception, as a 2009 study

⁹⁷Jolliffe and Harl’s study of first-year students at the University of Arkansas notes that those students read “a bit more in college than they did during their last year of high school, and they were reading a bit less for pleasure than they did during the previous year,” suggesting that this transition is perhaps less abrupt than educators perceive it to be.

measured their readability level at the fourth grade level (Stotsky, Goering, Jolliffe 3).⁹⁸

Nonetheless, that same study reported that those four books were the most frequently read amongst Arkansas high school students; the authors used this finding to conclude that

students going on to college from an American high school have had few common reading experiences aside from a large number of relatively easy-to-read contemporary young adult fantasies, and that their tastes for mature fiction and nonfiction have clearly not been developed. (2)

However, readability only measures aspects of a text like word difficulty and sentence length – these measures cannot account for the experiences a student has while reading the book and discussing it with others. Many of my students noted, even criticized, Stephenie Meyer’s writing, but they were also capable of analyzing the series beyond what a fourth-grader could accomplish.

Twilight also has many critics who disparage the machinations of the plot and the development of the characters, particularly in reference to the cringe-inducing sequence of events in the final book in which the werewolf Jacob “imprints” on (falls in everlasting love with) Bella and Edward’s half-vampire newborn daughter Renesmee. In response to this curious development, fantasy author Elizabeth Hand wrote, “Reader, I hurled,” in her review of *Breaking Dawn*. Hand and other critics also pointed out problems in the gender roles the series seemed to encourage. Christine Seifert probably speaks for many feminists when she observes that “Edward is a controlling dick” and Bella “a throwback to a 1950s housewife.” Describing Edward as a “pallid emo pansy with the gaseous pretentiousness of a perfume commercial,” fellow writer Brian McGreevy contributed this gem:

⁹⁸ ATOS for Books is a measurement tool developed by Renaissance Learning, the parent company of the Accelerated Reader program; in a publication sponsored by Renaissance Learning, Michael Milone cautions that a “readability estimate can be considered a probability statement rather than an exact scientific measure” (2).

Just as the Frito-Lay Company has created virtually nutrient-free vehicles of corn syrup and salt that make our youth fat, slow, and indiscriminate, the Castrati vampire is a confection that has the same impact on the psycho-dramatic imagination of today's youth.

McGreevy is not alone in suggesting that the perceived degeneracy of literature, both in writing level and in thematic impact, contributes to the degeneracy of youth culture in general, but I question the formulaic connection between what we read and who we are. As this study has suggested, the commerce between reading material, literacy identity, and subjectivity is more complicated than people suspect.

What I propose are reading classrooms that interrogate these assumptions about the effect of reading on individuals, and I feel that these courses are particularly relevant to the interests and concerns of traditional college-aged students. David Barton and Mary Hamilton remind us that “[l]iteracy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making” (7). Making a connection between the informal and the formal curriculum may help students bridge the perceived gaps between the reading expectations of high school and college instructors and between academic reading and reading for pleasure. While faculty have little control over informal exploration of new literacy practices in college, many hardly do better at streamlining and unifying *formal* training for new literacy practices. David Bartholomae notes that a student entering college “has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (273). Bartholomae makes the case for faculty and other experts in the disciplines to attend to students' new literacy practices in terms of not only their reading and writing skills but how they construct and situate their subject position as a student. However, professionals in literary studies have little consensus

on how readers should position themselves as subjects, when they unpack what they mean by “reading” at all.

Perhaps the term most tossed around by teachers of literature is *close reading*, which in English studies has been considered the cornerstone that, for Jane Gallop, “justifies the study of literature” itself (15). However, close reading occupies the unusual position of binding the many perspectives of literary (and some literacy) professionals together, without a number of those professionals having a really clear idea of what exactly they are doing. Generally speaking, close reading seems to mean careful attention to a text’s linguistic and formal features. It is believed to have several benefits to students in college: they learn how to pay close attention to tone and language, how to break apart a particularly difficult (or not-so-difficult) text, and how to consider how the parts contribute to the whole, among other useful reading skills. Jonathan Culler observes that close reading, “like motherhood and apple pie, is something we are all in favor of, even if what we do when we think we are doing close reading is very different” (8). However, close reading implies students’ investment in the text, often with the expectation of identifying or empathizing with the author or characters in the text. Closeness suggests intimacy, and close reading often entails students’ familiarity with the multitude of details in the lives inscribed in the text, as when my students were able to recall precise details about the characters in the *Twilight* series. While this can be an edifying or enriching reading position for students to occupy, the balance of power implied in close reading – teachers essentially forcing students into identifying with characters and authors – gives some pause; moreover, students may not have enough historical or contextual knowledge to carry off good close readings by themselves or as a cohort. Thus, close reading may have its place in English studies, but it also implies that a

student must situate himself or herself as a particular type of subject and that typical student reading is not acceptable for academic purposes.

Close reading tends to be identified with the type of reading Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus call *symptomatic reading*, where readers assume that meaning is “hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter,” preferably one skilled in the esoteric realm of literary theory (1). Symptomatic readings, they add, “often locate outright absences, gaps, and ellipses in texts, and then ask what those absences mean, what forces create them, and how they signify the questions that motivate the text, but that the text itself cannot articulate” (3). These types of readers make order out of a disorderly, slippery, or incoherent text, restructuring the text in the name of their own perspective. Best and Marcus reject what they perceive as the godlike symptomatic critic who mines meaning out of text for a different subject position, one who “seeks to occupy a paradoxical space of minimal critical agency” (17). They call this type of reading *surface reading*:

[W]e take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*. (9)

Surface reading takes a variety of forms, such as looking at the literal surface of a text through the lens of book history, or adapting new formalism to investigate the linguistic and literary structure of the words of the text.

However, Best and Marcus’s solution to the problem of symptomatic reading raises a few questions of its own. Is the ideal subject position of a reader (student or academic professional) one of “minimal critical agency”? Is it an ethical, academic, or effective practice to write much of the reader out of the experience of reading? Over the course of the semester with my *Twilight* students, I noticed that one phrase kept popping up, often when students were in heated debate

over the interpretation of Meyer's work. "It's just a story," someone would inevitably remark, suggesting a resistance to symptomatic reading and, some would imply, a resistance to further academic analysis of the text. However, the vast majority of their comments on the series belied that statement. When they talked about their experiences reading the series (often in their early teens), *Twilight* was rarely "just a story." Students reported losing themselves in the books, deeply identifying with characters, and talking (and speculating) incessantly with their friends about the events in Bella's life. Even the readers who disliked the series mined the text for hidden or missing salacious aspects of the characters, such as evidence that supported their stance that no 17-year-old should be dating anyone, vampire or not, over 100 years old. Essentially, many students tended to see themselves as subjects capable of making more meaning out of their reading than was on the surface of the text; they positioned themselves as authoritative readers without perceiving themselves to be symptomatic readers.

Thus, frameworks that consider the purpose of readers in coming to the text and the ways in which students perceive themselves as readers are, I think, more useful to explain reader subject positions. Ira James Allen observes that, generally speaking, faculty talk about reading in terms of a binary; on one end, *instrumental reading* captures the practices of individuals (mostly students not living up to their academic potential) intent on reading and writing in such a way as to portray themselves as academically successful. In other words, these individuals adopt the social identity of an academic reader and writer without investing in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. On the other end, *real reading* implies a reader who

is skilled to the extent that she discerns relations within and between texts, and she posits her own perspective on the world in a way that works with but is not identical to the texts to which she responds. Her reading thus matters, in part, because it is an ethical engagement with the words of others; it cares what the text has to say, and it cares what other readers think. (99)

Allen's study of faculty members suggests that they expect their students to perform real reading, perceive that they perform instrumental reading, and forget the ways in which their own research employs instrumental reading. His solution is to teach reading as a way to negotiate uncertainty:

We must be prepared to know neither the other nor ourselves. Only in negotiating such uncertainty in the process of seeking agreement, of engaging deeply with the text, may our prejudices become apparent to us and thus cease to structure our horizons of understanding. (108)

Allen's view of literacy practices as consistently evolving speaks to the ways eighteenth-century authors (and twenty-first century literacy professionals) view reading and writing as processes of negotiating social situations and reflecting upon the self.

In my *Twilight* course, the major writing assignments were structured to promote the view that reading and writing happen within social situations (see Appendix B). The description of each project began with a narrative that situated the student in a conversation with an audience: fellow readers of *Twilight* online, their professor and the academic literary community, their peers at the University of Arkansas, and other university faculty in addition to myself. These situations asked the students to present their reading of the series in a way that interacted with others' readings of *Twilight* and related books. In particular, to complete the first project successfully, students had to anticipate others' readings of *Twilight* – as noted above, popular reception of the series tended toward the inflammatory – and situate themselves in relationship to those readings and their chosen critic. For the second project, students had to read *Twilight* and one of the nineteenth-century texts in terms of the social practices and issues the texts addressed. The third project required students to work in groups (always a learning experience!) and put their literacy skills into action as they presented to their classmates and peers, in addition to

reading across history and culture for a particular social identity, the vampire.⁹⁹ For the fourth project, students were asked to draw connections between their everyday modes of writing, academic modes of writing, and new discourses that they wanted to enter.

These assignments were developed to engage students who define themselves in terms of various social identities. In contrast to the relative fixedness of personal identity, students who understand themselves as a self with a social identity recognize the fluidity of identity. Asking students to define themselves in purely personal terms promotes dualistic thinking: I am myself, and everyone else is not myself. Such thinking is an important developmental tool for adolescents and young adults, yet it can lead many students to stereotype others or impose their own ideas upon other societal groups. However, as students brought up in a culture which favors community already know, social identity and personal identity are mutable and contingent upon context. The fear that “deindividuating” others would result in stereotyping is less likely to happen if students recognize how individuals move back and forth between personal identification and group identification. Stereotypes “cut off any way of working back to particularities [...] and recognizing their mutability” (Pickering 99), but students with a well-formed social identity already exist within a relativistic world which allows individuals to have differences with the group while maintaining their membership. Moreover, grouping people according to values and beliefs may lead many students to confront the issue of stereotyping in their own reading. In the classroom, students can have a conversation about the differences and

⁹⁹ These projects were stellar, by far some of the best work done by first-year students that I have taught. Students covered a wide variety of cultures and discourses in their presentations, with titles like “From Gore to Glitter: Vampires Throughout the Years” and “A Once Bloody Hell: Misconceptions of Vampires.”

similarities of social identities and stereotypes, thereby bringing these complex issues into the open and demanding that students address the relevance of reading about others.

The emphasis on the fluidity of identity also addresses the difficulty of teaching reading in a postmodern world. Lester Faigley argues that the traditional paradigm of student subjectivity as cohesive and the more recent paradigm of student identity within a discourse community are problematic and not reflective of what postmodern subjectivity looks like (*Fragments* 17), yet many teachers view personal readings as the only viable entrance into the mindset of a “good” reader. When teaching students with multiple and sometimes conflicting ways of defining themselves, instructors’ focus on developing students’ critical readings must include a variety of initial perspectives on texts. Given that for some students, social identity is just as viable for a student’s sense of self as personal identity, instructors should take steps not to undermine this powerful act of self-definition just as they do not seek to radically destabilize students’ personal identity through reading. The multiplicity of perspectives in a classroom allows students to see the ways that academia aims to include the variety of subjectivities within a postmodern world, thereby constructing an academic identity for students who may not see themselves as good readers.

Literature offers students the opportunity to explore subjectivities outside of their own, but such explorations in the classroom are often politically and ideologically fraught. Most teachers are attuned to the potential “misreadings” of literature outside the students’ own experience, most often due to entrenched Western ideologies within the students’ mindset. However, many are not aware that if they assume that all students read and define themselves first and foremost as individuals, literature and literacy instructors unknowingly perpetuate Western ideologies of the self. In his study, Faigley concludes that underneath the description of

“good writing,” faculty often have in mind autobiographical writing which assumes “that individuals possess an identifiable ‘true’ self and that the true self can be expressed in discourse” (“Judging” 405). Yet as is true of all representations of self, Faigley argues, “[t]he self in student autobiographies, then, is not one that emerges like a butterfly from a chrysalis [...] but one that is discursively produced and discursively bounded” (411). Many teachers hold similar expectations for the self that students express as they read: a personal, individual, and cohesive self who creates structure out of texts and meanings from texts. Even as literature challenges students’ centering of Western ideologies, their teachers may reify those same ideologies by encoding the Western reader into the “ideal” student reading perspective.

Therefore, the students’ negotiation of the many selves in the reader and the text becomes a central concern for teachers of literature, in addition to becoming a point of resistance for students and teachers to avoid reifying the dominant discourse of the personal, interior self. Michael W. Smith makes the argument that “Treating others with an ethical respect [...] means living with the discomfort of knowing that although you can empathize with the experience of others, although you ought to try to imagine it, at least some of the time, you won’t be able to know it” (123). As a way out of the problem of discussing and therefore evaluating personal readings of a text, Smith and his coauthor Rabinowitz offer the solution of reading as the authorial audience – someone who is not fully yourself, but created and structured by the text. From this position, they argue, students can evaluate their critical distance from this authorial audience and resist or adopt its ways of being as they see fit. Moreover, this position helps students feel comfortable with the idea that they may not be *able* to join the communities in the texts they read, thereby positioning the personal self as limited rather than omnipotent.

Smith and Rabinowitz's concept of the authorial audience is nothing new to students with a developed social identity. In his definition of the term, Rabinowitz notes that authorial audience, as opposed to authorial intention, "refers to publically available social practice rather than to private mental processes" (8). Yet Rabinowitz and Smith fail to tie this form of reading to the way that some students already understand their own identities as members of a culture or group, wrongly articulating their concept as "not an inner psychological category" (8). Students whose cultures value social identity recognize the deeply intertwined processes of the personal and social levels of the self, thereby grounding this method of reading in both sociological and psychological categories. Rather than being taught these methods of reading, these students already understand what it is like to be both yourself and not yourself, a valuable step towards critical academic readings.

It might seem counterproductive to, in Katherine Hayles's words, enter "a disciplinary shift to a broader sense of reading strategies and their interrelation" while the definitions of reading practices are still under debate (65). However, I suggest that reading instructors should not only accept and support the various ways that our students read, but have students bring those ways of reading into conversation with one another. My historical study suggests that eighteenth-century culture came to understand literacy as inherently social, and Kelly Ritter suggests that the same is true of twenty-first century American culture:

[R]eading is not only more desirable to college students as a social endeavor, but in fact is more *intellectually successful* as a social practice, and [...] technologies that enable this socialization of reading practices allow students to achieve greater 'reading' successes than they experience in the traditional classroom setting. (44)

Currently, the discourse of personal readings of literary texts establishes a subject position in conflict with some (perhaps mostly non-mainstream) students at the college level. Their reading instructors favor individual critique of a socially isolated character, and while that subject

position may be useful to some students, accepting that subject position is a large step for students whose cultures have not always been accepted in academia. Including social identity construction in the reading classroom, therefore, asserts that different subject positions are valued by teachers, opening up space for a student to construct an academic identity. If, as James Ottery suggests, the discourse of academia “demands from us all that we sacrifice the origins, the traditions, the tongues, the rituals, the tribal fabric into which, from birth, any child is woven” (125), that sacrifice should be as painless as possible.

Paul Armstrong comments that “[r]eading is the elephant in the room, an unavoidable presence, no matter how we behave” (89). Armstrong and I agree that the return of reading as a focus of literary and literacy study is necessary for the continued success of students and faculty alike. Moreover, as online reading becomes more popular, renewed interest in the interaction between literacy and identity will become more necessary. As my study of attitudes towards literacy in the eighteenth century suggests, the term *reading* covers a wide variety of individual and social practices, yet discourses of taste and aesthetics tend to limit those practices. Reconsidering reading in terms of social identity expands our understanding of literacy and self-definition practices, challenging us to more closely examine what happens when we pick up a book.

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Appendix A

Monstrous Desire: The 19th Century Origins of the Twilight Series

ENGLISH 1023 – COMPOSITION II Spring 2012

Section 034 MWF 12:30-1:20 WCOB 336

Section 037 MWF 1:30-2:20 KIMP 313

Ms. Amy Hodges

Office Hours: MWF 2:30-3:30 Kimpel Hall 233

In a review of the *Twilight* series, Jo Keroes wrote, “Good books deal with themes of longing and loneliness, sexual passion and human frailty, alienation and fear just as the *Twilight* books do. But they do so by engaging us with complexities of feeling and subtleties of character, expressed in language that rises above banal mediocrity. Their reward is something more than just an escape into banal mediocrity. We deserve something better to get hooked on.” Keroes’s review raises two important questions that have haunted Gothic fiction since its rise to popularity in late eighteenth-century Britain. First, concerned citizens have asked, “Do Gothic texts send messages to readers that are dangerous, unhealthy, subversive, or perhaps even beneficial?” Second, many readers have asked, “What makes a work of literature *good*, and why do we need to have these standards?” Informed by these questions, this semester’s writing assignments will examine how Gothic horror of twenty-first-century America and nineteenth-century Britain equips its readers with ways of thinking and acting. We will also examine how the role of the popular culture critic and digital communication can help develop our reading, writing, and rhetorical skills.

Course Goals

The general goal of English 1023 is to help students with the reading, thinking, and writing processes associated with academic discourse. In this particular course, our assignments will fulfill the following learning goals:

1. Students will strengthen their critical reading skills through reading many different types of texts.
2. Students will develop a language that enables them to articulate the inner workings of various academic and non-academic texts and the impact of those inner workings on a reader.
3. Students will synthesize, analyze, and evaluate reliable secondary sources and use those sources to enter popular conversations about important issues.
4. Students will extract cultural implications from texts, communicate these intricacies to others, and posit their own solutions to the problems raised in the texts.

Required Texts

(Additional handouts for John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” and selected essays are posted on Blackboard. Links to acceptable e-texts are also on Blackboard.)

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Ed. Marilyn Gaull. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005. Print.
Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. *Carmilla*. Ed. Jamison Ridenhour. New York: Valancourt Books,

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Lunsford, Andrea A. *The St. Martin's Handbook*. 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. Print.

Meyer, Stephanie. *Breaking Dawn*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. 2008. Print.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.

Absences, Participation, and Late Work

Although attendance will be taken during each class period, only participation in class activities will be factored into the final grade. Each class day students are responsible for carefully reading the assigned material, completing homework from the previous class, bringing the textbook or printed handouts to class, and providing reasonably well thought-out comments on the assigned material. All students will have up to 4 absences before their participation grade is negatively affected. Documentation for absences will be required in the following situations:

1. Absences that result in students missing scheduled exams or assignment deadlines.
2. All missed class days after the fourth absence.

All undocumented late work will be reduced by five percentage points (90 to 85, 85 to 80, etc.) per 24 hours (including weekends and holidays) that it is late. I encourage all students concerned about the impact of their absences on their grade to meet with me during my office hours.

Blogs

In order to foster good writing habits, students in this course are required to keep a weekly blog. This blog may be hosted at the social networking site of your choice, and the privacy of this blog is up to you, provided that I can see it in order to give you credit for the work. During the semester, students will upload at least 3 of their best posts and 5 insightful comments on their classmates' posts on the class blog, located at <http://twilightcomp.blogspot.com/>. The content of these blogs should reflect the course material and course purposes; additionally, I will post questions based upon readings from the *St. Martin's Handbook* for you to respond to. Further guidelines can be found on the class blog, linked above.

Academic Honesty

The University's academic honesty policy can be found in the university catalog on the university's website. Students are held responsible for the guidelines contained in the university catalog and in this syllabus. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

- Information that is not your own original idea (such as information from web sources) but is included in your paper as if it were your own, intentionally or unintentionally.
- Patchwriting, which is defined by Rebecca Moore Howard in her article "A Plagiarism Pentimento" as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes."
- Direct cut-and-paste from any source (this includes significant fragments or phrases, as well as sentences and paragraphs) without identification (quotation marks) as the property of the source.
- Proper identification of the quotation but no citation leading back to its source.

Sanctions are indicated in the university's Sanction Rubric, and I encourage students to consult the University's Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct for information about their rights. **I also strongly encourage all students to visit during my office hours before the project is due to discuss documentation practices.**

Inclement Weather

On occasion, I may cancel class due to inclement weather, and I will notify you by email. In such an email, I will alert you to any changes in due dates of upcoming assignments. Commuting students must use their own good judgment if class is not cancelled and the weather is inclement.

Electronic Devices

Students are expected to use cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices in ways compatible with productive, engaged, and focused learning. Students may use electronic devices to look up the meaning of unfamiliar words, to consult any of the course texts, to provide supplemental information for the matter at hand, and to research course material. Uses of technology that are counterproductive or unrelated to the learning process will result in a lower participation grade.

Grades

Your grade will be distributed as follows:

Project One	10%
Project Two	15%
Project Three	15%
Project Four	20%
Blogs	10%
Writing Groups	10%
Midterm Exam	10%
Homework and Participation	10%
Total	100%

Grading Scale: 90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, 60-69 D, 0-59 F

Help Available to Students

I encourage all students to take advantage of the Quality Writing Center (Kimpel 315). Also, I am available to speak with you during my office hours (noted above) and via email (amhodge@uark.edu).

SYLLABUS

Unit One: Course introduction, critiquing, and genres.

Wednesday, January 18: Course introduction.

Friday, January 20: Interactive reading.

Monday, January 23: Audience. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 1-3.

Wednesday, January 25: Evaluating. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 4-5, “The Harsh Bigotry of *Twilight*-Haters” by Erika Christakis, and “Bite Me! (Or Don’t)” by Christine Seifert.

Friday, January 27: Purpose. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 6-7. Receive Project One assignment.

Monday, January 30: Structure. Read “Violence, Agency, and the Women of *Twilight*” by Anne Torkelson and “Another Feminist Defense of *Twilight*” by Kate Harding.

Wednesday, February 1: Analyzing. Bring two potential sources for Project One.

Friday, February 3: Genre. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume I, chapters 1-5.

Monday, February 6: Genre, Part II. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume I, chapters 6-9.

Wednesday, February 8: Drafting. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume I, chapters 10-13.
 Friday, February 10: Paragraphing. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume I, chapters 14-15, and Volume II, chapters 1-2.
 Monday, February 13: Attributing to sources. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume II, chapters 3-6.
 Wednesday, February 15: Editing. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume II, chapters 7-10.
 Friday, February 17: Writing Groups. Read *Northanger Abbey*, Volume II, chapters 10-16.

Unit Two: Synthesizing and arguing.

Monday, February 20: **Project One due.** Start reading “The Vampyre.”
 Wednesday, February 22: Synthesizing. Read “The Vampyre.”
 Friday, February 24: Synthesizing, Part II. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 8-11.
 Monday, February 27: Argumentation. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 12-14.
 Wednesday, February 29: Essay exams. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 16-18.
 Friday, March 2: **Midterm exam.**
 Monday, March 5: Writing about poetry. Read “The Giaour.”
 Wednesday, March 7: Writing about poetry. Read “The Giaour.”
 Friday, March 9: Providing Evidence. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 19-21, and “Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and Ethnicity in the *Twilight* Series” by Natalie Wilson.
 Monday, March 12: Providing Evidence, Part II. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 22-24.
 Wednesday, March 14: Writing Groups. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 25-27.
 Friday, March 16: **Project Two due.** Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 28-30.
 Monday, March 19; Wednesday, March 21; and Friday, March 23: Spring Break.

Unit Three: Researching, evaluating sources, and writing to an audience

Monday, March 26: Audience Analysis. Read *Carmilla*, chapters 1-4.
 Wednesday, March 28: Research Methods. Meet in Kimpel 206B. Read *Carmilla*, chapters 5-10.
 Friday, March 30: Academic Sources. Read *Carmilla*, chapters 11-16.
 Monday, April 2: Annotated Bibliographies. Meet in Kimpel 206 B. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 31-34.
 Wednesday, April 4: Writing and Speaking. Meet in Kimpel 206B. Read *Breaking Dawn*, chapters 35-39.
 Friday, April 6: Writing and Speaking, Part II. Read *Dracula*, chapters 1-3.
 Monday, April 9: Writing Groups/Presentation Rehearsal. Read *Dracula*, chapters 4-6.
 Wednesday, April 11: **Project Three Presentations.**
 Friday, April 13: **Project Three Presentations.**

Unit Four: Digital communication

Monday, April 16: Writing with multimedia. Read *Dracula*, chapters 7-9.
 Wednesday, April 18: Writing with multimedia, Part II. Read *Dracula*, chapters 10-12.
 Friday, April 20: Cyberculture. Read *Dracula*, chapters 13-15.
 Monday, April 23: Writing for Social Change. Read *Dracula*, chapters 16-18.
 Wednesday, April 25: Social Media. Read *Dracula*, chapters 19-21
 Friday, April 27: Problem-Solving and Participatory Culture. Read *Dracula*, chapters 22-24
 Monday, April 30: Writing in the Future. Read *Dracula*, chapters 25-27.
 Wednesday, May 2: Writing Groups.

Friday, May 4: Dead Day.

Friday, May 11: **Project Four due.**

Appendix B

Project One

You are a respected writer for an online popular culture magazine, and your editor slides a printout of an article on *Breaking Dawn* across your desk. She asks you to write an opinion column evaluating and responding to the article. Your officemate reminds you that the online magazine's audience will probably be familiar with the book and the movie, and they'll be most interested in hearing what you think about the issues raised by the series.

To complete this project, first choose an article from the ones listed on Blackboard that you want to evaluate and respond to. You may use another critic's review of *Breaking Dawn* that you find online, as long as you clear it with me first. Read the article carefully and write 2 ½-4 pages evaluating the critic's opinion and using evidence and reasoning to support your stance on the critic's opinion. Remember that you're not writing a traditional academic paper, so you need to think about how you're going to grab your audience's attention and how you're going to make your stance clear to them. You may use more than one source, but remember to link to all of your sources, give credit to them for their ideas, and quote them accurately.

You will be graded upon your ability to evaluate the validity of your source's arguments critically and to persuade your audience that your stance is reasonable.

Project Two

On a visit to your favorite professor's office, you start talking about the other courses you're taking. Your favorite professor says, "I've heard about the *Twilight* series. But I think it's silly to study something so simple at the college level. College students should be writing about great works of literature that address complex social problems." To prove to your favorite professor that you are capable of college-level depth of thought, you decide to write an academic essay that compares and contrasts the perspectives on a particular social issue or problem in *Twilight* and another literary work.

To complete this project, first choose one of the nineteenth-century works of literature we have studied so far this semester (*Northanger Abbey*, *The Vampyre*, or *The Giaour*). Then, determine a topic that you think both your chosen literary work and *Breaking Dawn* have in common. For example, you could compare and contrast the vampiric figures in both texts, the role of women in both texts, or the ethical stance of the hero in both texts, among other things. Then, examine the similarities and differences that you found and determine how both texts send messages to readers about a particular social issue or problem that people faced back then as well as today.

Finally, write a 3-5 page double-spaced essay that synthesizes the works' perspectives on that issue or problem. Your thesis statement will argue for the major similarities and/or differences in perspective on that issue or problem you see in the two texts; remember to include an academic introduction. Your conclusion will explain to your favorite professor what you learned while completing this project. You must quote, paraphrase, cite, and document your sources according

to one of the following academic styles of attribution: APA, MLA, or Chicago. You are not expected to consult any sources besides *Breaking Dawn* and your chosen literary work, but if you do consult any sources (including online sources), you must cite them according to the guidelines in the academic citation systems above.

You will be graded upon your ability to argue for the particular similarities and/or differences you see between the texts and to support that argument by comparing and contrasting textual evidence and plot and character details.

Project Three

When chatting with some of your friends in your student organization, they ask you a lot of questions about your continuing study of the *Twilight* series in your Composition II class and your growing knowledge of vampires, literature, and culture. “All of this sounds really interesting,” one of your friends says to you. “Our organization has to put on a spring event for the student body, but we haven’t decided on what exactly it should be. I bet the other students on this campus would be interested in learning about something fun like vampires.” With the other members of your student organization, you decide to put together a vampire symposium for the students at the University of Arkansas, and you volunteer to lead a small group that will present at this symposium.

With your group (4-6 members), decide on a topic from the list on Blackboard, or consult me to propose your own topic. These topics are broad in order to allow your group to develop and focus that topic on your own; you should also make a new title for your presentation. Using the library’s resources and your research skills, create a 10-15 minute informative presentation on your topic. Your group should draw information from at least 10 primary and secondary sources, and at least 8 sources should be academic. In the symposium, your class’s main goal is to inform your fellow college students about how vampires have meant different things in different media to different people throughout history. In your presentation, your group’s main goal is to educate your audience about the depth and breadth of your topic through an engaging presentation that includes new and interesting information for your audience to consider.

Group presentations will be given on April 11 and 13. At the time of your presentation, your group should turn in a PowerPoint (or other presentation software) to Blackboard. One member may submit the presentation for all group members. Each member of the group must take part in the presentation of the material. You should also be prepared to answer questions from the audience.

You will be graded upon your ability to inform your audience about academic research, to present material in a professional, engaging, and illuminating manner, and to incorporate appropriate written and spoken language into your presentation.

Project Four

“At this point in the semester,” your Composition II instructor says, “you’ve written for three different audiences: an online pop culture magazine audience, an academic audience, and

your peers. You've also completed two semesters of college-level writing courses. At this point in your academic career, the university community, and particularly university writing faculty, would like to know what you have learned and how you plan to use this knowledge in the future. As your writing instructor, I would like to know what you have learned about writing and reading from our exploration of issues in the *Twilight* series and nineteenth-century Gothic literature." You decide to write a 5-7 page reflective essay that explains your growth and future as a writer to the university community and to your Composition II instructor.

This reflective essay should have three parts.

- I. **Everyday Writing:** In the first section of your reflective essay, you should tell your audience about a type of writing that you do every day or very often. Some examples of everyday writing are updates to social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.), text messages to friends, forum posts, and comments on websites, although you may choose another type of everyday writing. In this portion of Project Four, your goal is to discuss how (or if) your experience in university writing has helped you contribute intelligent, appropriate, and carefully crafted ideas to conversations already in place.
- II. **Academic Writing:** In the second section of your reflective essay, you should tell your audience about your experiences with academic writing in university courses, both composition and non-composition. In this portion of Project Four, your goal is to discuss how (or if) your experience in university writing has helped you contribute intelligent, appropriate, and carefully crafted ideas to academic conversations.
- III. **New Type of Writing:** In the third section of your reflective essay, you should tell your audience about a type of writing that you want to learn how to do. You might want to do some research on the type of writing that you will need to do in your chosen profession. In this portion of Project Four, your goal is to discuss how (or if) your experience in university writing will help you contribute intelligent, appropriate, and carefully crafted ideas to a new audience.

Your audience does not expect you to spend the entire essay praising every moment of your composition courses; you may talk about your struggles or ways that the writing curriculum at the university could better serve your learning needs. Because you are writing a reflective essay, you will not be expected to incorporate research into your essay, but you are welcome to do so (and cite and document your research) if you wish. You should have an introduction, a conclusion, and a thesis statement that summarizes the main point or points of your reflective essay.

You will be graded upon your ability to inform your audience about your growth and development as a writer on a personal, academic, and future level; to explain the impact of your composition courses to university faculty; and to write reflectively, deeply, and thoughtfully about your experiences.

